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HELEN AND OLGA.

A Ruſſian Tale.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "MARY POWELL."

A. Manning.

O'er the far blue mountain,
O'er the salt sea's foam,
Come, thou long parted one,
Back to thy home
When the bright fire shineth,
Sad looks thy place,
And the true heart pineth,
Missing thy face!
Sisters are weeping thee,
Mournful and lone,
Come, thou dear parted one,
Back to thine own

MRS. HEMANS.

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CONTENTS.

PAGE

CHAPTER I.

VIRTUE'S REWARD 1

CHAPTER II.

A JOURNEY 7

CHAPTER III.

MADEMOISELLE BETTY 17

CHAPTER IV.

THE JOURNEY ENDED 27

CHAPTER V.

BARGAINING 31

CHAPTER VI.

OLGA'S REVELATIONS 47

CHAPTER VII.

HELEN'S MISGIVINGS 61

CHAPTER VIII.

AN OVERTURN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES 75

CHAPTER IX.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW 48

CHAPTER X.

OFFICIOUS INTERFERENCE 98

PAGE

CHAPTER XI.

UNEXPECTED DISAPPEARANCE 110

CHAPTER XII.

SPRING 131

CHAPTER XIII.

SUMMER-TIME IN THE COUNTRY 141

CHAPTER XIV.

A LORD OF THE SOIL 156

CHAPTER XV.

COUNTRY NEIGHBOURS 170

CHAPTER XVI.

LA VILLEGGIATURA 182

CHAPTER XVII.

TROUBLE 199

CHAPTER XVIII.

JEALOUSY 213

CHAPTER XIX.

ALEXIS 230

CHAPTER XX.

THE VISITORS 244

CHAPTER XXI.

EXPLANATIONS 263

CHAPTER XXII.

THE NEST FORSAKEN 281

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BIRDS SCATTERED 298



HELEN AND OLGA.



**

CHAPTER I.

VIRTUE'S REWARD.

THE plaintive sounds of a funeral hymn were heard slowly approaching the burial-ground that crowned a hill overlooking an old cathedral town. A Russian priest, with a censer in his hand, was preceded by a boy who bore an *obraz*, or sacred picture of the Saviour. Four persons followed, carrying a shabby open coffin of fir-planks roughly nailed together, over which was cast an old mort-cloth; and a few poor people attended as lookers-on rather than as mourners.*

Having reached the grave, the priest swung his censer once or twice within it, as if to perfume it;

* See the graphic account of this funeral in the Rev. Dr. Pinkerton's "Russia," p. 273 (2d edition, 1833), to which indeed it is owing that this story was ever written.

but, as the bystanders observed, the live coal in the censer was already extinguished, and it shed forth no incense. How often is the live coal extinct in our own hearts, while the semblance of a good action, destitute of all its real spirit, is valued at just its real worth by those whom we think we are deceiving!

The priest accompanied this act with a chanted prayer for the peace of the departed; after which, the cover of the coffin was brought. There was a rent down the middle of it, which did not escape the notice of sundry idlers who, by this time, had gathered round the grave.

"See what kind of a master she had," muttered one. "Poor creature! though she faithfully served him and his father seventy years, he has not at last bestowed on her a decent coffin!"

"God knows how it will fare with such masters at last," murmured another, who was a man-servant, "for the manner in which they treat us."

"Their own turn will come," rejoined the first; "'a golden bed won't heal the sick.'"

"What's the good of minding it?" grumbled a third; "'the cow has a long tongue, but may not speak.'"

"And 'the ass feels the goad, but dares not complain,'" added the first speaker.

Meanwhile the coffin was lowered into the grave;

after which the priest cast a handful of earth on it, and departed. A couple of women remained weeping.

"Is no one going to fill up the grave?" rather indignantly said the young man-servant, who seemed to have the oversight of the proceedings. "Here! run you,"—to a couple of young fellows, who immediately set off with alacrity, and returned with a couple of shovels. Each one present then threw a handful of earth on the coffin; after which, the two youths began to fill in the grave.

"Poor soul! her troubles are ended," said one of the women who had shed tears.

"Who was she?" said another who had just come up.

"Who? why, Katrina, the nurse of Boris the miser."

"Ivan Petrovitch Boris," said the man-servant quietly. "You know, if you call my master names in my hearing, I must take notice of it."

"'The roof-tree makes its comments to the floor, and the wall takes no notice of it,'" said the woman, ironically.

"Walls have ears, but no tongues, luckily," he returned; "but you are not the roof-tree."

"Well, but now, Kostia,* is there a greater skinflint in Russia than Ivan Petrovitch? Did he not

* Constantine.

grudge his own father bread and salt? Does he not hate a chance-guest like a Tartar? Often have I heard him mutter the proverb, 'Hast thou a pie? thou wilt soon have a friend at table.'"

"Perhaps that's the reason he so seldom has a pie," said Kostia, smiling, "lest a friend should have a finger in it."

"A friend! he has no real friend!" cried the woman indignantly. "He never had one!"

"Yes, Ouliana, he had."

"Who?" cried she, surprised.

"The poor old woman we have just buried," said Kostia. "She loved him unfeignedly. She ever cared for others more than for herself. No hard usage could alienate her affections. 'Were we not born on his land?' she would say. 'A good slave is ready to die for his master. All soldiers cannot be generals, neither all sailors admirals. Merry Tom became miserable when they set him at the head of the table. Let my master give me bread and work, I am content!'"

"Yes, that was ever her word," said Ouliana. "But yet a faithful foster-nurse is not an old boot, to be pulled off and kicked aside."

"No, no," said Kostia. "However, the grave is filled in now, so I must be off." Saying which, he suited the action to the word.

An Englishman, who had silently witnessed this

scene, now came forward. "Can you tell me anything of the history of this poor woman?" said he to Ouliana.

"Aye, that can I," replied Ouliana, who had no objection to gossip, whether with acquaintances or strangers. "You see, she was born on the land of Ivan Petrovitch, or rather, of his father Peter Boris. The old bârin was a good man, if ever there was one; his slaves truly called him their 'father.' 'We will carry him,' said they, 'to his grave, though it is ninety versts distant.' For, you see, he died on a journey. And they carried him all that way on their shoulders. But the son, woe be to him! was of a different sort; he gamed, he squandered much money in Moscow and Petersburg, he ruined his father and broke his heart. He then became as parsimonious as he had formerly been extravagant; grudged the most necessary expenses, bestowed nothing in charity, and exacted the highest capitation-tax of his serfs that he could lawfully demand. Even of poor old Katrina he took sixty roubles a year! And yet she had suckled him and rocked his cradle! She was the mother of three as fine sons as ever you saw; but lost them all, one way or another. The eldest knocked out one of his front teeth to prevent his being enlisted, just as he was going to be married; but the excuse was not allowed. He died in battle. The second was lost

in a snowdrift. The third ran away and was never more heard of, leaving his only child, a boy named Alexis, dependent on his mother. She was always expecting him to return."

"Poor Demetri!" exclaimed the other woman. "His heart will burn when he hears how she died and how she was buried!"

"He never will," returned Ouliana mysteriously. "Depend on it, his days were cut short long since."

"By what?" cried the stranger.

"The knout!"

CHAPTER II.

A JOURNEY.

IT is night: pitch dark, and piercing cold. A flaring lamp throws its yellow, wavering light on the blue, pinched features of a government official who stands beneath the open piazza of a remote post-station, holding a desultory dialogue with a fair, fresh-coloured young man of two-and-twenty, with curling light-brown hair and beard, and frank, pleasing countenance; who is dressed in the ordinary long blue coat, closely buttoned to the throat, which is worn by the respectable Russians of the lower ranks.

The tinkling of horse-bells is heard approaching. "Wake up, you lazy curs!" says the official, unceremoniously kicking a dark heaving mass on the ground, which speedily resolves itself into half-a-dozen rough-looking peasants, who start up, rubbing their eyes.

"A kibitka approaches," cries one of them. "Now then, draw lots." And before the kibitka reached the post-station the die had been cast, and

the luckless speaker proved to be the man who must change the horses; while his more fortunate comrades immediately flung themselves down on the ground and resumed their nap.

"'Tis she, this time!" said the young man, as the kibitka drew up, and discovered a female inmate, veiled and muffled in furs.

"Is any one waiting for me here?" said a sweet but anxious voice, speaking French in an accent neither purely French nor Russian.

"Sudarina, here is a trusty escort sent with a private carriage to conduct you to your journey's end," said the officer. "Will it please you to alight? Will you take some refreshment? some tea? The samovar * is ready."

"I shall like a cup of hot tea very much," replied she, preparing to quit the kibitka.

"And doubtless you have brought tea with you," said the official, handing her out.

"I! No, indeed! I thought you had some."

"Your pardon, sudarina,—I said I had an urn and hot water."

"Oh well, it is only another little disappointment," said the poor young lady, with *great* disappointment in her tone. "What a strange country! I am benumbed with cold, but yet I cannot drink boiling water."

* A small portable boiler.

"A little brandy, sudarina?"

"Oh no! I have not yet become accustomed to the sight of women drinking raw brandy."

"But with a little boiling water in it, sudarina, you will find it no bad thing. Mr. Alexis," continued the officer, turning to the young man,—who having given some orders and a few kopecks to the driver, "Na vodka," *i.e.* for brandy, had followed them into the house—"perhaps you may have brought some tea?"

"Certainly I have," replied Alexis, "and fowls, eggs, ham, and white bread. Could I have been certified when the sudarina would arrive, and that she would travel unprovided, all should have been ready. But all *will* be ready soon," added he kindly, as he looked full into her face, and observed two warm tears ready to fall and freeze on her cold cheeks.

She had seated herself in a wooden arm-chair beside the stove, and thrown up her stiffened veil; thereby disclosing a very pleasing and almost beautiful face, though neither Grecian in its contour nor Russian in its pure pink and white. The complexion was clear, soft brunette, with a healthy English colour; but was now glazed with cold, while every feature and gesture betrayed forlorn discomfort.

"All will soon be ready," repeated Alexis in a still more reassuring tone; and hastening to fulfil

his promises, the tea was soon unpacked, the dirty table soon covered with a clean white cloth, the urn soon filled with boiling water, and bread, ham, and eggs soon placed on the board.

Alexis speedily brought a steaming basin of tea, though without milk or sugar, to his fair charge, and helped her to withdraw the thick gloves from her benumbed fingers. Tears were still quietly trickling down her face; but she gratefully took the basin, drank the tea, was warmed and comforted.

Alexis next presented a ham sandwich, which was thankfully accepted; then an egg, boiled soft. But this was declined; so he boiled it hard, and put it away cold. He knew they should need all their stores on the road they were to go.

Meanwhile the luggage of the kibitka, a rude vehicle somewhat resembling a large cradle on four wheels, was transferred to an exceeding shabby old French open calash, that had been supplied with three fresh horses harnessed abreast by the yamstchik who had drawn the lot, and who now; in his broad-brimmed hat and sheepskin coat girt with a leathern belt, stood, whip in hand, ready to start. The lady found that her new acquaintance was making ready to travel with her; and though somewhat startled at the idea of performing so wild a journey with an entire stranger, the goodness and honesty of his

countenance prepared her to trust him, and to think it rather preferable to travelling by herself.

Accordingly, he, having already stowed away, under the apron of the calash, the miscellaneous stores he had brought with him, tucked his companion warmly up in her furs, let down the bass-matting which formed a kind of curtains to the hood of the calash, and placed himself at her side. The official lifted his hat, and said "God speed you!" the yamstchik cracked his whip and uttered a shrill cry, and the horses sprang forward, jingling their bells, into the darkness of night.

The travellers were profoundly silent. Each gave the other every facility for meditation or sleep. They were galloping along a rude road through an interminable forest, with boughs of trees laid across here and there, where the ground sank into holes. The jingling bells and the wild song of the driver prevented the howls of the wolves from being heard, till the horses suddenly stood still, fixed in a bed of sand. Alexis put his head out between the mats; the yamstchik alighted, cracked his whip, vociferated, tugged at the horses' mouths, and endeavoured to propel the calash by pushing it from behind. They continued immovable. Then it was that the young Englishwoman thrilled at the baying of the wolves. Alexis, perhaps guessing her sensations, or possibly feeling impatient on his own account, sprang out,

set his shoulder to one of the wheels, and, with the yamstchik's help, urged the carriage out of the hollow. Then he resumed his seat, and they pursued their journey, but more slowly and noiselessly than before, so that the wolves could still be occasionally heard.

"Mademoiselle's repose has been disturbed," said Alexis, in excellent French.

"Oh, I was not sleeping," replied she; "I was thinking of home."

"An English home?"

"Yes, an English country parsonage, unlike anything you have here."

"Our clergy are not like the benighted Romanists, either," said Alexis. "They marry, and live comfortably with their wives and children."

"So I have heard. May I ask who you are? M. Boris's son?"

"M. Boris has no son; though all serfs call their master 'father.' His only child is a daughter, named Olga, of whom he is as fond as he is capable of being fond of anything; and so desirous that she should have every advantage that he can bestow, that he has sent for you to come all the way from England, to make her what she ought to be."

"And you are—"

"His serf."

"His *slave?*"

"We are all slaves, either of the Emperor, or of the landed proprietors."

"But you speak French like—"

"A native? Russians have a remarkable facility in acquiring languages."

"Like a gentleman, I was going to say; and yet you say you are not one."

"We slaves wear gilt collars sometimes," said Alexis, rather bitterly. "If we show any signs of talent—for music or painting, for instance, or for any particular mechanical art—our masters cultivate it at their own expense, but for their own profit and advantage. Now, I, as a boy, was considered to show promise of talent in more ways than one, and therefore my master traded with it as he would with anything else—sent me to St. Petersburg, to Vienna, to Berlin, to Paris, and gave me the best of educations, as far as it went."

"Since he has educated you like a son, he might as well treat you like one."

"His son! You don't know him!"

"I meant, by adopting you, as our old English merchants and tradesmen sometimes adopted their clerks and apprentices. He might repose confidence in you—look on you as his right hand."

"He does both, whenever it suits his purpose. But that is not like being a father."

"What is your father?"

"He is dead!—or lost!"

"Lost!"

"He disappeared."

Helen stopped short. She had heard vague reports of banishments, exiles, imprisonments, and deaths, but was not particularly well read on the subject; her father's little library, indeed, comprising few books relating to Russia. She feared to harrow her companion's feelings by pursuing a subject that might be too dreadful to be approached without great emotion, and therefore, after a short pause, abruptly asked what Mademoiselle Boris was like.

"Olga Ivanovna? Like a well-disposed but unformed girl of sixteen," was his reply. "She is blooming as an apple-blossom, pure pink and white, tall as a pine, and slight as a lath. She has a will of her own, but may be easily guided by those she loves. She is profoundly ignorant, but very capable of improvement. You may do with her what you like."

"Does she love her father?"

"I suppose so."

"And he—is not amiable."

"Not exactly," said Alexis drily.

"He is in some business, I think?"

"He has a provincial government office. Nobles do not trade."

Here, the road becoming harder, the horses in-

creased their speed; and the driver's song rising louder and wilder, put a stop to further conversation. Helen ruminated on what she had heard, and was growing drowsy, when they reached the next post-station.

"Would you like to go on, or to alight?" said Alexis.

"I am very tired. Could we remain here till daybreak?"

"Can the lady sleep here?" said Alexis to the official.

"Oh certainly—that is, at the tavern adjoining; there is plenty of accommodation."

"We will not have the calash put up, however," said Alexis to Helen, "till you have seen your bed."

She felt as if any bed would be better than none, and entered the house, but presently came forth in dismay.

"There is no bed," said she to Alexis. "Men, women, and children are sleeping on the oven, on the floor, and on a sort of shelf round the room. It is so stifling, I cannot breathe in it."

"I guessed it would be so," said Alexis. "Nothing better will occur on the road. You had best sleep in the calash, Mademoiselle, and I will lie on that bench under the piazza, and play dwornick."

"What is dwornick?"

"The dwornick is the domestic watchman of

every family, who does all the rough work by day, and plays sentinel all night. There, now Mademoiselle is drawn up in the stable, and muffled and curtained as snugly as she could be in a house. As the window is unglazed, and the shutter open, I shall lock you in, and drag my bench across the door."



CHAPTER III.

MADEMOISELLE BETTY.

HELEN, on being left alone, arranged her quarters rather more to her mind by the light of a lantern that hung from the rafters; and then, stretching herself at full length in her strange bed, whispered her prayers, and almost instantly fell asleep. She dreamed of home—she seemed amidst the familiar circle, herself unseen; there was her pale mother in widow's weeds, knitting by firelight; Gerald stretched along the window-seat, straining his eyes over a book in the fading twilight; Marian sewing with all her might; the two little girls, Susy and Georgy, sitting on the rug, with their arms round each other's neck, deep in some childish confab.

"Do let me come to the fire," Gerald said, or seemed to say, "I'm so cold! and you two kittens take up all the rug."

"You didn't want the fire, Gerald, as long as you could see to read. Oh, don't touch me with your cold fingers!"

"Hush, children, hush," says the gentle mother, "there is room for all. Have you forgotten already the pretty verse—

'Be to others kind and true,
As you'd have others be to you?'

—Think of poor Helen, how glad she would be to be in the coldest corner of this room."

"I see her in the fire," cries one of the kittens, "driving along very fast—oh, in such a funny chaise! All through burning fields, and over burning mountains,—"

"Snowy, not burning," interrupts the other kitten. "Mamma, I saw in Mrs. Frost's shop-window such a large wedding-cake, all covered with sugar like snow! And it put me in mind of Helen."

"Mother," says Gerald, gravely, "I'm sorry to find from this book that there are numbers of wolves in the Russian forests—"

"Don't talk of them, my dear boy; you make me sick."

"Well, and if there are," says Georgy, speaking very fast, "Helen is not going to live in a forest, but in a house—a warm house, with stoves even in the hall, and on the stairs (for she told me so herself), and stoves in all the bedrooms, up to the very garrets, and stoves even for footstools; and *bon-bons* to eat whenever she likes; and plenty of guns to

shoot wolves, if ever they should be so hungry as to come in great bands into the towns—"

"Which they do sometimes," says Susy, in a drawling monotone that was quite a laughable caricature; "they tear up the dead bodies in churchyards—"

"You naughty girl, how can you say such things in poor mamma's hearing?" whispers Gerald fiercely, and giving her a nudge.

"They *do*, Gerald, and Helen herself, if she were here, would say so!"

"Why, here I am," cries Helen, bursting in upon them all; and in the joy, laughter, tears, and excitement of that meeting poor Helen awoke—awoke to find herself in a Russian stable, empty and dark, for the lantern light had gone out. Fearful and disquieted, she lay a prey to feverish imaginings, till it occurred to her to remember Who had been born in an inn-stable and laid in a manger; it lulled each care to rest; she became quiet, slept, and slept without a dream.

When she awoke, a woman was looking at her; and though she was only a rough peasant, whose language she did not understand, Helen felt protected and comforted. After a sufficiently awkward toilette, and a breakfast such as the calash's stores supplied, she found herself once more travelling beside Alexis, in the chill, dreary dawn of a winter

morning, with fresh driver and horses, along the verge of endless morasses, and across interminable plains.

Helen's sound sleep, however, had refreshed her; and she preferred having the curtains put aside, that she might look out on the country, such as it was. Alexis evidently was well pleased with the improved appearance of his charge, and interested in his mission. His manner was perfectly respectful, but easy and cheerful.

"Mademoiselle thinks this, and with reason, a long and terrible journey," said he; "but she has a protector, she has food, she has the certainty of a welcome at the end. Whereas I know of the journey of a lady as young, who had none of these comforts; who travelled quite alone, far into Siberia, and all in vain." *

"How was that?" inquired Helen.

"Doubtless you have read—every one has read Madame Cottin's charming tale of 'Elizabeth,'" said Alexis, "and every one knows that the young girl on whose real story—a more pathetic one—it was founded, was 'Prasca Loupouloff.' There has been a more modern Elizabeth, who undertook a somewhat similar enterprise, though not on foot, for the sake, not of a father, but a brother. Her name is Elizabeth, or Betty Ambos.

* Mrs. Jameson's Visits and Sketches.

I was at St. Petersburg when she returned from Siberia."

"Tell me what you know of her," said Helen.

"She was a Bavarian, the daughter of a respectable wine-merchant. Her brother Henri, a young man of great promise, was professor of theology at a university near Riga. Unfortunately, he fell in love with a beautiful Jewess, and persuaded her to elope with him. They were to fly to Silesia, where she was to be baptized, and to become his wife. But they were pursued, overtaken, and separated; and the young man was brought to justice, for carrying the girl off by force. He pleaded that she was a consenting party; her family denied it, and she was brought into court. The poor girl, who probably had been previously intimidated, trembling and in broken accents denied that she had consented to her abduction. On hearing this from her own lips, Henri Ambos, seized with sudden frenzy, rushed towards her with his clasp-knife, and being held back, impetuously attempted his own life, and was carried off to prison.

"From that hour he was neither seen nor heard of more. His family were unable to learn his fate. Six years passed in this terrible uncertainty, during which time his father died. One day, a travelling pedlar came to the door, and desired to speak to the family. On being admitted, he said that, a year

ago, he had seen a man in rags and with a long beard, working in fetters, with other criminals, near the fortress of Barinska in Siberia. He had told the pedlar his name was Henri Ambos, and implored him to convey news of him to his family, and to beg them to intercede for him with the Emperor.

"The only one who felt equal to this enterprise was Mademoiselle Betty. She begged her mother's blessing, and, amid the tears and prayers of her family, set forth. Having first possessed herself of all the necessary documents in the town where Henri's trial had taken place, she proceeded to St. Petersburg, where she presented herself, with her petition, to the minister of the interior. He refused her all assistance so entirely that she quitted him in sorrow and anger. Thenceforth she placed herself in the Emperor's way whenever he went into public, in the hope of being able to give him her petition; but all in vain.

"At length, having become acquainted with some amiable ladies, whom she interested by her story, one of them, a Countess Elise, said, 'Though I dare not present you to the Emperor, yet, if you merely want access to him, I will lend you a court-dress, a carriage, and my own servants shall announce you by my name.' Mademoiselle Betty knelt at the Countess's feet, and gratefully accepted the offer.

" The stratagem succeeded. The Emperor, hearing the Countess Elise announced, smilingly advanced to meet her; but stopped short on perceiving a stranger. Mademoiselle Betty sprang forward with clasped hands, and fell at his feet, exclaiming, ' Pardon, your imperial majesty! pardon!' He raised her, and mildly asked what she sought. Bursting into tears, she briefly related her story, and held towards him her papers; which the Emperor took and attentively read. His countenance, which she anxiously watched, did not betray the impression they made on him; but when he reached the end, he briefly said, ' Mademoiselle, your brother is pardoned.' Overpowered by her feelings, she sank at his feet: he raised her, and conducted her to the door of the apartment.

" On returning to her temporary home, where some days passed without her receiving any confirmation of the good news, suspense and excitement brought on a nervous fever, attended with delirium; during which her brother's spectre appeared to stand at her side. She was just recovering, when one of the imperial attendants brought her a packet, which proved to contain Henri's pardon, formally made out. The minister of the interior offered to forward it to Siberia; but so fearful was she of any mischance, that she resolved on carrying it herself. She therefore immediately started for Moscow,

which she reached in three days. But the town, to the governor of which her paper was addressed, was nine thousand versts from Moscow; and the fortress where her brother lay captive was a considerable distance beyond that. She travelled fast, seven days and seven nights, only sleeping in the kibitka; then rested two days; then posted seven more days and nights.

"She had no companion; and for hundreds of versts she saw no living creature. Hunger was added to fatigue; for often she was unable to obtain food. The journey was horrible in the highest degree. At length she reached the fortress, and was courteously received by the commandant. She presented the pardon to him in a flutter of hope and fear: as he read it his countenance became more and more grave, and she wondered why he read it so slowly. At length he looked up at her and said, 'Mademoiselle, I am sorry,—but—Henri Ambos is *dead.*'"

"Ah!" ejaculated Helen.

"There was nothing for it," continued Alexis, "but for her to return homeward with a torn heart. She had travelled to Barinska in hope; she quitted it in despair. On her return to St. Petersburg, she was welcomed and caressed as a wonder; but there was no spirit left in her."

"Did you see her?"

"Yes."

"What was she like?"

"A good-humoured, well-grown, pleasing girl, with dark hazel eyes and luxuriant light hair—nothing more."

"Perhaps her brother was *not* dead, after all!"

"That had not occurred to me," said Alexis. "But no—no, it could hardly have been so. You know, she saw his spectre."

As this argument did not appear conclusive to Helen, she was silent; and they presently reached the bank of a frozen river, which it was necessary to cross on a raft. The little variety which this afforded to the monotony of the road was not of long continuance: again they were traversing bleak plains, on a road which was being repaired, at long intervals, by wretched gangs of criminals, guarded and in chains.

"We have no such sight as this in my country," said Helen, "unless in a few dock-yards. How degraded, how repulsive their countenances are! It is almost sadder to meet them, than to travel along a perfectly desolate road."

At this instant the calash suddenly overturned; and it would have fared ill with the travellers but for the aid of the gang they had just passed, who, with their guard, came running up to help them. With a good deal of noise and bustle, the calash was set

up again, and its scattered luggage replaced. Helen compassionately distributed among the poor men what small coin she had; and Alexis gave them a cracked bottle of brandy, very little of which had been spilt, and which they received with a grin of delight. One man, shaggy and grizzled, remained a little apart, rooted to the spot where he stood. Just as they were driving off, "Who are you?" he cried hoarsely.

Alexis made no answer to what seemed an impertinent question.

"What's your name?" shouted the man after him.

Suddenly Alexis leant forward out of the calash, looked back and cried—"Alexis Dimitrivitch!"

A roar, rather than a human cry, came back upon the wind, half-drowned in the noise of the horse-bells. It was followed by a brutal laugh of many voices; and then by the echo of the sound which had first made Alexis turn red and then deadly pale. He started up as if to stop the driver, sat down again; rose up, looked irrresolute, and finally sank down, buried his face in his furred cap, and turned away. He scarcely spoke again for some hours.

The words which the criminals had shouted back to him were—"He says he's your father!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE JOURNEY ENDED.

FROM this time Helen's journey was rendered still more dreary to her by the gloomy silence of her companion. When at length he spoke, it was to relate dismal stories of men devoured by bears; of children torn from their cradles by wolves, or by the malignant spirit called the Leechie; of serfs slain by their masters; and of masters slain by their serfs; of peasants lost in ice-holes; and of villages swept away by inundations. As these were not cheerful subjects, Helen inquired what was the burthen of the interminable ballad the yamstchik was singing. It was all on love and courtship; but being in a minor key, the effect was plaintive.

"*All* our national airs are plaintive," said Alexis abruptly, and then relapsed into silence.

Towards the afternoon, Helen was glad to find a portion of their journey was to be performed by water, on a river not yet frozen across, only encumbered with many blocks of ice. They embarked on

board a large passage-boat, which also received the calash. The boatmen urged it along with long poles, which aided them also in staving off the ice: they were constantly running from one end of the boat to the other. Helen was glad to find a poor woman on board, the wife of one of the boatmen. She looked patient, but melancholy, and held an infant in her arms. Helen, in broken Russ, endeavoured to ask her its name, and how old it was. When she at length made herself understood, the mother frowned, drew a handkerchief over the child, and carried it into the cabin.

"She is afraid of the evil eye," said Alexis in explanation. "It is very unlucky to ask the name of a child. Had she told you any name, it would certainly have been a wrong one."

Helen watched the shores of the river till it grew dusk. They were flat, and clothed with stunted firs; and now and then a clearing disclosed a distant village, a country seat, or a church with blue or green cupola sprinkled with golden stars. Sometimes other boats passed them, laden with tallow and hides. When there seemed any danger of a collision, the men in each boat uttered loud cries, and rushed to and fro as if frantic.

Helen passed the night more comfortably than the preceding. The woman made up a little bed for her in the cabin; and now that the baby was

hidden away, was attentive and obliging, though in deeds rather than words. The next morning they proceeded till the ice prevented their progress. With some danger and difficulty, and a great deal of noise, they were landed, and once more pursuing their journey in the calash.

Still nothing but plains, arid plains, and pine forests, with now and then a poor village, consisting of a double row of log huts, roofed with shingles, and with their gables towards the road. Yet Alexis maintained that in summer-time the country was pretty, even beautiful. "Wait till it comes; you will pronounce it so."

Helen felt persuaded to the contrary; but it was cheering to think that this dreary, weary journey was near its end. Just as night was closing in, they reached a long straggling suburb of wooden houses, for the most part painted grey, black, or yellow; with cheerful firelight, or lamp-light, here and there shining through the crevices of shuttered windows. Here and there were muffled people moving along with lanterns, or entering shops lighted with flaring oil; especially the tea and brandy shops, which seemed full of customers. Now over a bridge; now past a public building or a church. At length the calash drove into a court-yard with a lamp over the house-door, and stopped. A dwornick came up, and helped the travellers to alight. They entered a

hall, the warmth of which was grateful. Several servants hastened forth, who busied themselves about the luggage; and at the same time, some one leant over the banister of the staircase and cried out in a young, eager voice, "Who is it, Alexis?—Alexis! who is it?"

"*Mademoiselle,*" replied Alexis, looking upward, "*c'est Mademoiselle la Gouvernante.*"

Immediately a figure, light as a fawn, and draped in soft, clear white, came springing down the stairs; and catching up a light from the hall-table, held it full in Helen's face, and gave her a searching, scrutinizing look. Apparently, the investigation was satisfactory; for the next moment the young girl set down the lamp and welcomed Helen with a hearty kiss.

"Come in, come in," said she cordially. "How cold and tired you must be!"

She drew her towards the parlour, at the door of which, however, appeared some one very different from the blooming young Russian—an elderly, austere-looking man, who, unceremoniously putting back the young lady and shutting her out, led Helen up to the light, and scrutinized her as keenly as his daughter had done.



CHAPTER V.

BARGAINING.

"YOU are very young," said he, with marked dissatisfaction. "I had understood you were a lady of mature age."

"I hope my age will prove the only thing, sir, you do not like," said Helen quietly.

"I don't know, I don't know," returned he rapidly, and in very indifferent French—"youth has its inseparable follies and weaknesses. Two babies together—What can I expect? What steadiness? what experience?"

"I am sorry, sir, these objections did not occur before I travelled so far," said Helen, much hurt.

"I have been deceived—probably we have both been deceived," said he. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

"Twenty-two! And I expected a woman of forty-two! Two thousand roubles a year to a girl of twenty-two? A thousand will be enough!"

"You do me injustice, sir," said Helen with spirit.

"Be content. We have each a different bargain from what we looked for. You will take a thousand roubles?"

"Certainly not."

"Twelve hundred, then."

"Sir, I cannot think of lowering my salary. I have performed this long, harassing journey on the express understanding that I was engaged for two thousand roubles a year."

"My agent has deceived us both."

"That is no fault of mine."

"In consideration of which I will give you twelve hundred roubles."

"No, sir, I can make no reduction."

"Be content. Say fourteen hundred."

"I cannot, and will not."

"What do you expect?"

"The salary which was offered me, and which induced me to leave home."

"The bribe was enormous, I grant, and might well have done that. But you were represented to me as a person of mature age. Should I otherwise have sent you so young an escort?"

"I have nothing to do with that, sir."

"Two such young persons, travelling together for days in each other's company, was highly improper."

"That was your own arrangement, sir. I was helpless."

"What will your friends in England say?"

"My friends in England will be exceedingly sorry I ever left them." And Helen's tears began to fall.

"You think to move me. Not at all. Olga frequently weeps; but it does not affect me in the least."

"What am I to do, sir? Am I to return?"

"If you do, it will be at your own expense and peril. What! am I to import you for nothing?"

"What, then, is to be done?"

"You may remain, at fifteen hundred roubles."

"No, sir, I cannot. I have left a widowed and impoverished mother whom I dearly love, solely that I might contribute to her support."

"Well, in consideration of that, I will make it sixteen hundred ('paper'). But you are too young, too young."

"I should be the same, sir, at any salary."

"True; and therefore you would be dear to me at any price. However, we have settled it now; so go, lay aside your travelling dress."

"No, sir, we have not settled it, unless I am to have two thousand roubles."

"What! so young and so extortionate? But you have been brought up in a bad school—the school of poverty."

"I have not been brought up in a bad school, sir, but by virtuous and wise parents; nor were we

poor, till my father died, though our style of living was simple and inexpensive."

"A conscientious man will not leave his widow and orphans unprovided."

"A country curate, sir, may be able to meet the expenses of a large family, but can hardly save."

"You mistake, you mistake. All may save. You, with fifteen hundred roubles, or with a thousand, will save."

"Of course, sir; my object is to contribute to the support of my family: but I shall not take less than two thousand roubles."

"Had ever a young person such pertinacity, or such avarice? It does not speak well for you, I can tell you."

"I am sorry for it, sir."

"But, come, you are fagged, and look harassed, —sit down. We can talk as well sitting as standing. What think you of Russia?"

"I have not seen much yet, sir, to prepossess me in its favour."

"No, no, not while it is buried in snow; but you will like it by and by, when the frost melts. It is a fine country—fine country; finer than England."

"I am not surprised to hear you say so, sir."

"Indeed? You are improving! I thought you would not have admitted it."

"I have had no opportunity as yet of drawing a comparison; and to each their own country is dear."

"What can you teach?"

"Music, drawing, French, Italian—"

"Bah! French we are familiar with already, and music and drawing are better taught by masters. Can you impart ladylike deportment, and a general air of high breeding and style?"

"I will do what I can, sir—"

"Dancing I do not insist on. Olga has a dancing master twice a week, and a religion master twice a week, so you will not interfere with her Christianity. They come on alternate days."

"I am glad they do not come on the same day, sir."

"No, that would be too fatiguing. You must not over-fatigue your pupil, but impart to her all you can in the easiest possible manner. Otherwise she will not bear it."

"Is she delicate, sir?"

"Why, no, not exactly; though she has grown fast. But her temper is peculiar; she is not accustomed to yield to any one but to me: if you guide her, it must be by a rein of silk."

"I trust no other will be needful, sir."

"But you must be very watchful, very watchful. You must inform me of everything. She must form

no acquaintances, pay no visits, receive no visitors, no letters, without my knowledge—my private knowledge, you understand. She is known to be a girl of great wealth, and will doubtless be considered a good match by many whose addresses I should not approve of. You will therefore gain her confidence—"

"To betray it, sir?"

"Pshaw! who talks of such a thing with respect to a mere child? In one word, it is I who shall be your paymaster, and to whom you therefore owe fidelity. Do you own this?"

"Of course, sir, if I am not to be a spy."

"A spy? Go, go; there are spies in all Russia; aye, and in every country and every circle, though we hate the word. You must be my daughter's protectress, adviser, monitor—a second mother. It is a sad thing to have lost a mother."

"It is, indeed, sir."

"Well, we understand each other now. As soon as you are ready, we will sit down to table."

"First, am I quite sure I do understand you, sir?—Two thousand roubles—"

"Two thousand? Fifteen hundred. That is, sixteen hundred ('paper')," *sotto voce.*

"No, no!—"

"Yes, yes!—"

"Indeed, sir, I cannot!—"

"You are spoiling the dinner. The fish will be in rags! Well, well, then, two thousand ('paper') roubles, which you must repay me for in the best way you can; but it is too much, too much—for I expected a woman of mature age. Now go; and pray do not make too tedious a toilette: remember the fish!"

Helen curtsied, and retired, hardly knowing whether she felt most inclined to laugh or to cry. Immediately outside the door she encountered her new pupil, who gave her an intelligent look, put her finger on her lips, seized her round the waist, and half dragged her up stairs. The room into which she conducted her was well warmed and lighted, but small and poorly furnished.

"I heard every word!" cried Olga, kissing her again, and then almost forcing her into an arm-chair close to the stove. "I listened at the door! Oh, what meanness!"

"What meanness, indeed!" said Helen, unable to refrain from laughing; "but I wonder at your acknowledging it to be such."

"Because he is my own father, you mean—"

"Because you are your own self. Dear Olga, we shall soon, I hope, know and understand each other better—we do neither at present. But now I must dress as quickly as possible, for I am told dinner is ready."

"Let me help you. Or shall I ring for your maid? Mine is a professed lady's maid, trained by a French milliner at St. Petersburg, and called Stephanie, though her Russian name is Stepania; very pretty, very clever, and very good in the main. Alexis is deeply in love with her; but of course I shall not let her marry him, as I should then lose her services: nor will my father hear of Alexis's purchasing his freedom; he puts him off with fair words, and raises his price year by year. But for you I have appointed a Russian girl new to service: her name is Fedosia. She will, I hope, suit you; but if she prove awkward, you must box her ears; or, if you prefer it, I will do so myself."

"I hope to have no need for either," said Helen, busying herself in uncording a small box.

"Pray, do not do that yourself, the servants will only despise you: I will ring for Fedosia;" and she did so as she spoke. The bell was answered by a pretty young Russian in the national dress—a tight-fitting crimson sarofane, that is, with gold buttons up the front, over a full chemise tied with blue ribbons; and her long fair hair plaited in a thick braid, which hung down her back. As she and Helen had no mutual language, Olga remained in the room under pretence of being interpreter, but in reality to see the contents of the box; and Helen, who would rather have dispensed with the company

of both, but feared to appear unsociable, hastily finished dressing amid much chattering, and then repaired to the dining-room; Olga again flinging her arm round her, and bearing her onwards with a dancing step, as if they were performing a waltz without music.

M. Boris received them as a hungry man might be expected to do, who had only had anchovies and a small glass of brandy at a side-table to whet his appetite—drily, that is, if not with impatience. He placed himself in the centre of an oval table, with a young lady on either hand. The fish was spoilt; he raised his eyebrows, and shrugged his shoulders, as if it were no more than he expected. A tall, awkward man-servant, in ill-fitting livery, brought him a dish of roast veal, and stumbling, dropped the joint on the floor.

"Go into the corner, Michael," said M. Boris authoritatively; on which the abashed menial meekly went up to a corner of the room and placed himself there with his hands straight to his sides, while Helen knew not which way to look, and could hardly help laughing. Olga, who was watching her with the keenness of a hawk, saw the difficulty with which she was repressing her risibility, and burst out into a perfect peal of merriment.

"This will never do," thought Helen, who conquered herself immediately by a strong effort, chiefly

enforced by the consideration of the poor footman's supposed annoyance.

"What is that for, Olga?" said M. Boris with surprise.

"Because, papa, it is so funny to see Mademoiselle Helen ready to burst with laughing, yet not daring to do so."

"She is better bred than you are. There is nothing to laugh at. She will get used to our customs presently."

"Oh yes, very soon," said Helen. "I have no disposition to laugh, I assure you, but am very sorry for the poor man, and that it should have been needful to you to correct him. Perhaps in consideration of the pain I have been the means of giving him, his punishment may now be remitted."

"Change my plate, Michael," said M. Boris, hitting him, however, as he did so, "and beware of such awkwardness again, or I shall send you to the police station."

As this was tantamount to a threat of a good flogging, poor Michael looked penitent enough.

M. Boris then asked Helen several questions about her journey, the state of the roads, her passage from England, and similar topics; but so much *de haut en bas*, that she felt chilled. Olga seemed chiefly occupied in watching her; and when she spoke, it was generally to utter something flighty or

childish. She was much prettier, however, than Alexis had given Helen reason to expect, and dressed with a lavish profusion of ornament, to which her English eyes had not been accustomed. It seemed the result of extremely girlish tastes, uncontrolled by authority or by limited means.

The instant they had dined, Olga said, "Now, papa, we will leave you to your wine," and in her too-familiar, caressing way, led Helen into the drawing-room; whispering, with a suppressed laugh, "I might have added, to his nap too."

As soon as Helen had seated herself, Olga threw herself on a cushion at her feet, and indulged herself with another good investigation; saying, "I know I shall like you, though I did not expect it; for you exactly resemble the heroine of the last French novel I read—'les yeux remplis de bonté'—'un grand front'—'les cheveux bruns'—'le teint délicat'—'la figure mince.' I know we shall like each other—pray, what do you think of *me?*"

"I do not form my conclusions as rapidly as you do," said Helen; "you must give me at least a fortnight to make up my mind."

"That reply is arid and repelling to the last degree," said Olga. "But I know what it means—that you are afraid of committing yourself. You are either afraid of annoying me by saying how unformed and forward you think me, or you are afraid

of flattering me by saying you think me altogether charming."

"Aye, which?" said Helen.

"No matter," cried Olga; "all will come straight. I mean to put myself completely under your control till I find I don't like it. Nobody, you know, could make me do that but myself; for though I heard papa tell you that nobody could manage me but himself, the fact is, no one but I can manage *him.* And I could get him to dismiss you directly, I give you my word! But don't be afraid: I don't want to do so. I want you to take me in hand and make me just what I wish—*tout à fait charmante,* in short! *Will* you?"

"I do not know that I can," said Helen.

"You distrust me. Ah well, never mind. Tell me now all about your English home. I want to know what sort of place you come from—what sort of people you have been accustomed to see."

"Have some mercy on me," said Helen. "Consider that I am a poor, weary traveller, needing repose of body and mind."

"Nothing rests me so much as talking," said Olga; "nor does anything tire me more than silence. That is one reason why I am glad you are come."

"Please yourself and me too, then," said Helen, "by talking for both."

"That you may study my character? Aha! I have guessed your motive! No matter; what is there to conceal in it? My faults, I'm afraid, are as soon seen as my virtues."

"I am glad you know you have some faults. Pray, what are they?"

"Oh! it will be too hard to tell you what you will so soon find out! And I may not know them all, perhaps."

"Perhaps!"

"That is a very malicious echo of yours. However, will you really candidly tell me all you find amiss in me?"

"Most readily."

"Hum! I should like to see your first letter to England!—Not that I should advise you to put anything into it you would wish no one here to see, especially about papa; for it will certainly be read."

"By whom?" said Helen hastily.

"Well, there are people in the house, and people out of the house—I say no more. Only this I tell you, that papa reads, unsuspected, as he thinks, every note and letter of mine—*as far as he knows.* But, mark you, I have ways and means."

"My dear Olga! I am perfectly astounded by the unconcern with which you tell me, a stranger, of actions and feelings I consider highly culpable."

"Culpable! Why, if you were hedged about in

"The servants may call you Miss May," said she at length, "but I shall certainly call you Helen. Papa led me to suppose you would be somebody quite old. Perhaps he meant to surprise me into liking you. And yet, no, that is not his way of doing things. No, he was really surprised himself, I believe, unless he affected to be so for the sake of lowering your salary. But it makes no difference to us; I hope and believe we shall like each other. But you look terribly tired! Are you? Would you like to retire to your room?"

Helen confessed that nothing would be so acceptable to her.

"So let it be, then. I will accompany you, to see that all is comfortable. Were you to remain up, we could only play preference, or chat while my father dozed or read letters. Come, then!"



CHAPTER VI.

OLGA'S REVELATIONS.

ON their way to Helen's room, Olga drew her into her own, which was replete with every comfort and many luxuries. "Remain here a little while," said she, placing her in an easy-chair, "and I will soon return to you." Saying which, she ran off, leaving Helen to collect her thoughts in a scene so new and strange to her.

"What a position is mine," thought she. "Here is a girl too old to fear me, too young to be her own mistress, too giddy and self-willed to promise me anything short of continual trouble; and for what success dare I hope? Nay, that is not my affair—'Duties are ours, events are God's.'"

Olga returned after an absence of some length. "Come now," cried she, "and you will find I have not been wasting my time. When I thought some cross old goody was coming to look after me, I appointed her a room as meagrely furnished as possible, thinking anything would be good enough

for her—a hard bed, greasy chair, and shabby toilette. 'Nous avons changé tout cela,' as you shall see!"

In fact, Helen scarcely recognised her old quarters—an eider-down quilt covered with new and pretty green silk, flounced pillow-case and toilette-cover, an elegant as well as comfortable easy-chair, writing-table, and footstool, with abundant accommodation for her wardrobe, showed that Olga had not been unmindful of her.

"To-morrow you shall have pictures and looking-glasses," said Olga; "but just now, Gregory is engaged, and cannot nail them up. May I see you unpack? I should like it so much! But no, no; you are too tired. Content yourself to-night with your sac-de-nuit, and defer unpacking till to-morrow, when you will have plenty of leisure; for I shall be engaged with my religion master, as papa calls him. Oh Helen! he has such a red nose!—I fear the good old soul loves brandy."

"Fie, Olga!"

"Then why does he smell of it? Hey?—What is this little book you are taking out so carefully?"

"You may look and see."

"'The Holy Bible; containing the Old and New Testaments, translated out of the original tongues, and with the former translations diligently compared and revised.' This is the book you heretics are so

fond of. I believe I shall like to read it, though Madame Laporte said it has done a world of harm. 'Helen May; with a fond mother's prayers and blessing.' So, then, your mother gave it you!"

Helen made no answer; and Olga remained reading where she stood for some little time; laying it down at length, with the brief word, "Curious!"

"I must teach her reverence," thought Helen.

At this moment, Fedosia and another young woman, who was extremely pretty and well-dressed, entered, carrying a small couch between them.

"This is my French maid," said Olga, familiarly patting the girl on the back. "Hold up your head, Stephanie, and show yourself to advantage."

The young person did not seem disposed to fulfil her mistress's commands, and having curtsied to Helen, silently withdrew.

"She seems to have been shedding tears, and looks in distress," said Helen.

"Only because she has had a piece of bad news for Alexis," said Olga unconcernedly. "His old grandmother died and was buried in his absence."

"Was he much attached to her?"

"Well, . . . she was his only surviving relative, and had petted him a good deal; but young men don't care much for their grandmothers, do they? —She was a deaf, dirty old woman."

"One she could help; the other she could not."

"No; but they made her very disagreeable. I told Kostia to see she had all the attention that was proper; and Stephanie wanted to go to the funeral, but all her fine linen was about, neither starched nor ironed, so of course I could not spare her.—What are you thinking of me?" said Olga suddenly.

"You take me so by surprise that you chase my ideas out of my head," said Helen. "I am thinking that—you are very young."

Olga burst out laughing. "Time will cure me of that," said she. "What a good thing if it could cure me of every other fault as certainly! Well, good night, good night! I see you are dying to get rid of me."

And, kissing her with her usual impetuosity and abruptness, she left Helen at length to peace and solitude.

Her head was dizzy with long travelling and with new impressions; her thoughts were confused, now darting off to her home, then sadly returning to herself; and she disturbed herself with the questions, "What shall I do? How shall I get on?" As these were beyond her power to settle, we shall not presume to settle them for her; but leave her to the quiet enjoyment of a night's good sleep.

The next morning, Helen was summoned to rather a late breakfast, which M. Boris discussed as drily as his dinner the previous evening. Olga chatted

incessantly; but of such trifles, in such a trifling manner, that they made no impression. Thus, she spent ten minutes in abusing the tie of her father's cravat, and on the subject of cravats in general; what their excellence lay in, and how it was to be attained. Then on the comparative merits of tea, coffee, and chocolate; then on the delinquencies of servants; and, lastly, on the impossibility of wearing any but French shoes.

When she entered on this subject, M. Boris pushed away his cup, pocketed his newspaper, and walked off to his office.

"We shall see no more of him till dinner," said Olga. "And now I must consider the bill of fare, give my orders, and prepare for my old priest; so you can do what you like."

As Helen had plenty to do in her own room, this was by no means unacceptable to her. When she had finished unpacking, she sat down to write to her mother with great eagerness; but as soon as she had written, "Dearest, dearest mother," she paused with tears in her eyes:—home feelings came over her so strongly! There was so much to say, so much that had better remain unsaid. Why should she give one fruitless pang to her so far away? But yet there was plenty to be told that might and should be told; and when once she began, her pen ran quickly enough. Pausing at length, she felt a soft

breath on her cheek; and, turning round with a start, found the smiling face of Olga close to her own.

"Is this what you call honour in Russia?" said Helen.

"Why need you bring in the country?" said the unblushing Olga; "what is it to me what all the Russias say?"

"Then there's an end," said Helen, coldly removing the caressing hand from her shoulder and resuming her pen.

"Do I tease you?" said Olga.

"You do much more," replied Helen, continuing to write. "I had supposed there was an innate sense of honour implanted in every gentlewoman's breast."

"What if it should not be in mine?"

"There can be no fellow-feeling between us."

"Well?" said Olga hardily.

"And in that case I shall take measures to procure another situation in St. Petersburg or Moscow."

"You would not!" cried Olga incredulously.

"I certainly should—and shall."

Olga seemed, for once, struck dumb.

"Ah," said she, presently recovering, "my father would not let you."

"Your father would have no power to prevent me. I am not a serf."

"But you would not go, would you?" twining her arms about her and speaking insinuatingly. "You are only in play."

"Quite in earnest. And whether in play or in earnest, I never say one thing when I mean another."

"Oh, *that's* quite incredible!" cried Olga decisively; "no human being ever attained such a pitch of perfection as that."

"I am sorry you think so; but really I wish you would at present give me the opportunity of finishing my letter."

"I want to understand a little more of this honour you think so much of," said Olga, still hovering about her.

"It prevents people from doing shabby things."

"Shabby!" with a little umbrage.

"Yes, whether alone or not—whether with the utmost secrecy, and, as they think, without the power of detection, or not."

The heightening of Olga's colour betrayed consciousness that she had not always been bound by this nice restraint. But her eye brightened too.

"There sounds something grand in it," said she.

"Grand!" repeated Helen; "I am quite ashamed of you! It is far too common to be grand. Go, busy yourself till your priest comes, in writing a little theme upon honour, and try to clear up your

ideas about it. They will not ill prepare you for your Christian instructions."

And, kissing her kindly but gravely, she silently resumed her employment.

When Helen had finished her letter, she went in search of her charge, whom she met skipping up stairs to rejoin her.

"I have done," said Olga; "have you?"

"Yes. How shall I send my letter, without its being made use of in the way you have hinted at?"

After a moment of serious thought, "You had better, I believe," said Olga, "give it to Alexis."

"You think him safe."

"I believe him the soul of honour. He refused once, in spite of a considerable bribe, to convey a letter of mine, clandestinely, to Frederick."

"Who is Frederick?"

"Ah, I cannot talk of him out here on the landing," cried Olga, with a sudden, vivid blush, as beautiful as it was uncommon. She threw her arm round Helen's waist, and tried to waltz her into her boudoir. Having dismissed Stephanie to find Alexis, she sat down on a low stool at Helen's feet, and proceeded thus:—

"Frederick Vas—By-the-bye, Frederick, you are aware, is not a Russian name—he had a Prussian godfather—Frederick Vassilivitch is one of the nicest and most completely handsome young men you ever

saw. Noble, of course; but poor as an apostle. When he likes people, he says to them the prettiest things you ever heard, or can imagine. He has frequently said things of this sort to me: conceive how I like him!"

"Olga!"

"He is Sophia's first cousin; consequently we used continually to meet at her father's house, and when we were riding. As he waltzed with me, sang with me, flattered me, how could I do else than— But here's Alexis. Alexis, Mademoiselle Helène desires to know who can be trusted faithfully to post her letters, without reading them in the first instance, or taking them to any one else to read. I have mentioned you."

"I feel the compliment, sudarina," said Alexis. "Mademoiselle need be under no fear for her letters between this room and the post-office."

And receiving Helen's packet, he withdrew.

"Only a partial assurance," said Helen, gravely, "though all that he can be responsible for. But, to resume—"

And she turned her eyes steadfastly on Olga, with a look full of affectionate anxiety.

"Ah! do not look so sad," said Olga. "Where was I?"

"As he waltzed with you, sang with you, and flattered you, what could—"

"Aye—what could be the result but one? Of course, I thought of him continually, was happiest in his sight, and peevish and *triste* when out of it. It would have been the same with you in my place."

"I trust it would not."

"Nonsense: that's because you've never seen him. We corresponded—privately, of course—Helen! what makes you look so very, very unhappy?"

"I wish I could recal my letter to my mother!"

"Why?"

"Because my charge here is altogether a different one from what I had supposed; one to which I feel quite unequal; and one which I feel I must give up."

"Oh no, no!—Dearest Helen!"

"Hush, listen to me—the warmest caresses have no effect—I believed I was come to undertake the domestic education of a young, simple, pure-hearted, right-feeling girl, guiltless even of the knowledge of the grown up world's bad ways; innocent of intrigue as an English girl. Instead of which,—oh, Olga!—"

Olga blushed till cheek, neck, and brow shared the suffusion. She turned away from Helen's eyes.

"It's nothing," said she at last, in a tone of affected lightness. But her voice was scarcely audible.

"It's everything," said Helen. "Oh, mamma,

mamma!—" and she laid her head on her arms and wept.

"Are you crying for *me?*" said Olga, with emotion. "But you won't go?"

"I must."

"What, and leave me to grow worse? Oh, Helen!"

And flinging her arms round the neck of her new friend, she burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

"I would stay if you would grow better," said Helen, weeping too.

"I will, I will! That is, I'll try.—Anything to keep you here, for I like you so much, and I'm so lonely!" And Olga sobbed anew. "What means have I had of being good? Whom have I had to teach me, poor, motherless girl? Position, example, everything has been against me! You must show me how to be good, and I will try; but, indeed, I know not whether I can!"

"Oh yes, dear Olga, if you will indeed try, and indeed pray to succeed. If the will is not wanting, you cannot fail."

"The will shall not be wanting," said Olga, drying her eyes. "So, now let us kiss and be friends. And don't talk any more in that shocking way, of leaving me; for, if you do it often, I shall only think you say so to frighten me. And now, what shall we do? Here is the best part of the day before us, and it is

too late to go to church: too early to visit. Of course I am not going to do A B C lessons, like a little child. In fact, the best way you can educate me, will be to enlighten and improve me by your general conversation and example; giving me a little hint, now and then, when you think I want it; consoling me in trouble, and advising me in difficulty."

"I believe some course of that sort will be the best to pursue," said Helen.

"Yes, yes, I know it quite well—I am not so stupid as you may think, however ignorant I may be. I know my own wants, and feel them; what I have been at a loss for has been how to remedy them. I believe my father, without intending it in the least, has supplied me with the very person to assist me."

"Before you say any more, dear Olga, let me deprecate that habit of continually attributing unworthy motives to your father. It shows such a want of filial respect."

"Why, how on earth can I respect him?"

"I must know a little more of him before I can answer that question. But whatever may be a parent's faults, a child should try to cover them."

Olga looked dubious about this; but instead of discussing the subject, said—

"Well, we will lunch now, and then drive out.

You would like to see something of the city, I suppose?"

"Very much. I was thinking of proposing a walk, if you did not mind the cold."

"A walk? Oh, women of fashion don't walk much," said Olga, laughing. "We will drive about the principal streets and do a little shopping. But, first, lunch; and while that is making ready, we will sing, if you please."

With all her regained lightness of heart, she accompanied Helen to the drawing-room; and sitting down to a grand pianoforte, skimmed over the keys with more facility than expression.

"That will give you some idea of my style," said she, breaking off abruptly; and then dashing into showy polkas, mazourkas, and waltzes.

"Do you like that? Do you like that?" she inquired at the end of each; for Helen's approval was becoming hourly more desirable to her; and she felt pretty secure of admiration of her musical abilities.

"You have not heard me sing yet," said she, without attending to the footman's announcement of luncheon. And she launched into

"Di piacer mi balza il cor,"

with a young, fresh voice, that only required cultivation to win the applause she thought already its

due. "Now let me hear *you*," said she, starting up, and drawing Helen to the music-stool. Helen, after a moment's thought, played part of Mozart's Mass in C, and then sang—

"What though I trace each herb and flower."

Olga, who was keenly sensitive to the power of music, was subdued by it; and when it ceased, there was a pause.

"That's not at all my style," said she at length, "but it is much finer. And now for luncheon; and then for our drive."

CHAPTER VII.

HELEN'S MISGIVINGS.

"I FORGOT to tell you," said Olga to her new friend, as they drove through the principal street, "that Madame Birschoff is expecting us this evening at one of her dull soirées; where people do nothing but eat sweetmeats, talk scandal, play *rouge et noir*, and look at each other's dresses."

"Are you, then, considered old enough to go out into society?" inquired Helen.

"With you for my steady chaperon," replied Olga, laughing. "The fact is, I make rules for myself. People know I am a motherless, unprotected girl, with plenty of money in prospect, so they are not very hard upon me. My father cares not where I am, if I am with safe companions; so why should I not take what little and meagre compensation for never going to St. Petersburg I find within my reach? I know many prudent mammas and aunts look on me with great dislike and contempt; but what matters it? Ah!—"

At this moment, a gentleman, showily dressed,

driving a very shabby troïka,* looked earnestly into the carriage, and bowed profoundly to Olga. He was about eight-and-twenty, and strikingly handsome. Helen thought he looked like Count Koningsmark, Thaddeus of Warsaw, Kotzebue's "Stranger," or any hero of the sentimental romantic school. Turning to Olga, she caught a glimpse of a deep blush ere she averted her head. The next moment she laid her hand on Helen's arm.

"Who was it?" said Helen.

"Now you have seen him!" was Olga's indirect reply. "Is he not incomparable?"

"Incomparable! what a word!"

"You think him interesting?—"

"Not particularly so. My dear Olga, I have never been accustomed to think persons interesting or incomparable merely from their exteriors—and in such a moment, too!"

"Helen, I am all in a flutter. Perhaps we may meet him to-night! Ah, what shall I do? I knew not he was here. I supposed him at St. Petersburg."

"If your father has forbidden your meeting him, you must remain at home."

"My father has not forbidden, though I know he does not like him; and he has consented to my accepting Madame Birschoff's invitation; therefore, I shall go."

* Three horses abreast.

"Olga, what a pity it is you are forestalling the temptations and trials of a later age! Far happier and more estimable would you be, quietly improving your mind."

"Thank you. I dare say. Ah! we are driving past Kustrin's. I want gloves, gold thread, and half-a-dozen things. How preoccupied I am!"

They alighted at a fashionable shop, where Helen would have been amused at the Russian mode of cheapening extortionately priced goods, had she not been full of painful anxieties. The shopman required so much beating down, Olga was so capricious, and hovered over so many pretty things she did not want, that daylight waned before they left the shop. Olga had yet other purchases to make at different shops, though snow-flakes were beginning to waver through the air; and she now seemed much more occupied in thinking how many kopecks per arsheen Kustrin had overcharged her for the French ribbons, than of the handsome Vassilivitch. Besides, she was continually nodding and bowing to female acquaintance of various degrees of intimacy; therefore Helen, reserving conversation for a more disengaged season, amused herself with noticing the many new objects in the streets: the bridges, churches, monasteries, hospitals; the tea-shops, with a white teapot and teacups painted on their sign-boards, with glimpses of boys in their shirt sleeves

waiting on long-bearded peasants; the street-keepers' little station-houses at street corners; booths of wearing apparel, with their owners sleeping on bales of goods, or awake and bargaining; priests, with long hair and flowing robes; vehicles of various descriptions, from the noble's equipage, driven by a long-bearded coachman, in a quilted velvet cap, with a red scarf round his waist, to the rude telega, and lumbering cart drawn by oxen. Nothing struck her more than continually seeing men kissing and embracing their male acquaintance, wherever they met them; three kisses on one cheek, three on the other—six in all, to each fresh party.

It was quite dusk when they drove into their own courtyard; and they had to dress in haste, not to keep M. Boris waiting. He received them with his accustomed dryness.

"What of your day?"

"We have been shopping, papa. And in the morning I had my old priest."

"And no studies? no lessons?"

"We practised singing a little," said Olga, carelessly. "I am rather too old, papa, for dates of remarkable events, weights and measures, and those sorts of things."

"I think some system of regular mental application might be devised, and should be pursued," said M. Boris, looking at Helen.

"I think so too, sir," said Helen. "I hope to organize some plan of the kind to-morrow."

"I yawn at the thought of it," said Olga, yawning fearfully, and then laughing. The sham yawn, as usual, was soon followed by a real one.

"What plan do you propose to adopt?" pursued M. Boris.

"Unpacking, and other employments, have broken into the day," said Helen. "I must look into Olga's books before I arrange anything; to see what progress she has made, and what she has read."

"My books!" cried Olga merrily. "What do you suppose are the books that form nearly my whole library?"

"I cannot tell; nor am I probably acquainted with their authors."

"You know best about that. They are—Paul de Kock, Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Eugène Sue—"

"Olga!"

"Emile de Girardin, Emile Souvestre—"

"The last is harmless enough, at any rate," said Helen. "The others I only know by name."

"To tell you the truth, that is my case too: I only wanted to frighten you."

"You will certainly frighten me, if you do not speak the truth."

"Aye, aye; quite right," said M. Boris. "You

are taking up the right tone with her. As for me, I know none of the authors she has mentioned: one may be as good or as bad as another; but I look to you, Mademoiselle, to confine her to the good."

"I certainly shall, if I can," said Helen.

Olga looked mischievous, but said nothing, and helped herself to almonds and raisins.

"Where do almonds come from? Where do nutmegs come from? Where does cinnamon come from?" said she, suddenly. "Those are the sort of questions my old governess used to ask me. Much good they could do to my mind, morals, and manners—"

"She was of the old school," said M. Boris, shortly. "But if you had treated her with respect and submission, she could have taught you much."

"I prefer the new school, papa; and am much obliged to you for giving me so nice a companion as Helen."

"Mademoiselle Helen."

"Mademoiselle to you, papa, but not to me. I should not respect her a bit the more, but all the less."

"The question is not of what you like, but of what you owe."

"It's a debt I shall not pay," muttered Olga. "Have some preserved ginger, Helen?"

"No, thank you."

"Then let us retreat to our own quarters, and have a little nap before we dress. Papa, we are going to Madame Birschoff's this evening."

"So you told me before. I hope you will enjoy yourselves."

"Will you go, too?"

"No, it would be no enjoyment to *me*."

"I knew he would say so," whispered Olga to Helen as they left the dining-room; "but I wished to be secure of it."

"You cannot think how it pains me," said Helen, "to hear you talk in this way."

"Are you going to side with papa?"

"Indeed, Olga, you yourself make me now and then think there is need for it. Put yourself in M. Boris's place: the father of an only child, who deceives him and treats him disrespectfully; of an only daughter, scarcely sixteen, who carries on clandestine correspondences. Surely, if he knew Captain Vassilivitch—"

"Captain?" repeated Olga, laughing violently. "Poor Frederick is not in the army—I wish he were!"

"I thought he looked like a military man," said Helen.

"Ah, he would become a uniform, that's certain. No, poor fellow! His father pinched himself to give him a good University education till he was

three-and-twenty, thinking he had interest enough to procure him good government employment. After waiting more than a year, Frederick got a place worth—how much do you think?—four silver roubles a month! from which one was deducted for his rank, leaving him three for board, lodging, clothes, cigars, and all the necessary expenses of a gentleman! On that he starves."

"He does not look much reduced," said Helen, smiling.

"Well, of course he does not absolutely want bread; he boards with his father in St. Petersburg, and with his uncle here: between one and the other of them, and his visits to country-seats when he is not wanted in his office, he seldom has to find himself in food. But only think! Three roubles a month! Not enough for gloves!"

"Doubtless, he would think a rich wife no bad thing," said Helen.

This idea seemed a new one to Olga, for she changed colour, and looked quickly at Helen.

"That won't do," said she, the next minute. "I am certain that is not his motive for seeking to please me. I hate mercenary people, and unjust people too: and *you* are unjust in prejudging a person of whom you know nothing. Come, let us sleep a little while, to prepare us for the fatigues of the evening. I feel dreadfully tired."

She threw herself on a couch, and the next instant was, or seemed to be, asleep. Helen, on the opposite couch, thought long and yearningly of home.

In about an hour Olga started up, saying it was time to dress. Helen, doubtful what amount of decoration would be suitable, and having a black satin dress and white swan's-down tippet, hoped she was unexceptionably attired, whether for few or many. Olga, in white tulle, with bunches of golden wheat-ears, and bright gold ornaments, pronounced Helen's costume old enough for a grandmother; yet, on deliberation, decided that it was very appropriate for a chaperon, and that she looked very pretty, in spite of it.

"But if you were not in mourning," said she, "pink moiré, or delicate pale blue satin, would suit you best."

"And leave me about as poor as a government clerk with three roubles a month!" said Helen.

"Four," said Olga, who did not like the allusion. "He receives four, if he cannot spend them. But, with regard to your mourning; why should you wear it in this country, where no one knows you are an orphan?"

"Because I loved my father more than you love yours," said Helen.

Olga was checked, and led the way to the carriage in silence.

The streets were powdered with fresh fallen snow, and very ill-lighted. At Madame Birschoff's door, however, were plenty of flambeaux and lamps, to light them into a region of warmth and brilliancy. Elegantly dressed ladies were sitting in a row, all round the drawing-room, and gentlemen talking in groups in the midst; and, now and then, singly, addressing themselves to their female acquaintance. Places were soon found for Helen and Olga in the circle by the obliging Madame Birschoff; and they then had ample leisure to look at the company, and talk to one another.

"Entertaining, is it not?" said Olga, ironically. "Is this the way you have parties in England? I am sure it cannot be the French plan. Here come the servants with refreshments. I always make it a rule to eat as many sweetmeats as I can, to pass away the time; and I advise you to do the same. The bon-bons are delicious."

Between the courses, Olga took care to keep her eye turned towards the door, through which she expected, or hoped, to see Vassilivitch enter. But the prolonged disappointment of her wishes filled her with chagrin.

"How tiresome this is!" said she aside to Helen. "What a horribly stupid evening! I wish I were in bed and asleep. But—is it possible? Can it indeed be she? Yes, it is Sophia Petrovna! Oh, Helen!

look at my estranged friend, that young lady in pink, next the old lady in black velvet; and see how she meets my eye as if we had never before met!"

"Some effrontery, certainly," said Helen.

"Effrontery? No, not quite that; but—so unfeeling, so base! To think what endearments we have exchanged, what vows we have made, what kindnesses we have lavished on one another, what protestations of eternal fidelity we have uttered; and —that it should come to this!"

"Are you enough of an English scholar," said Helen, "to be acquainted with our Shakspeare's 'Midsummer Night's Dream?'"

"No," said Olga. "Mendelssohn's, not Shakspeare's—Why?"

"Because Helena, one of his heroines, felt aggrieved, very much as you do, at the alienation of her friend; and expressed it very pathetically:—

> 'Injurious Hermia! most ungrateful maid!
> Is all the friendship that we two have shared—
> When we have chid the hasty-footed time
> For parting us—Oh! and is all forgot?'"

"That's exactly it," said Olga, with a deep sigh. "What had alienated the one from the other?"

"They were both attached to the same person; or, at least, one of them was in a dreamy, mazy kind of state that made it appear so."

"That makes our cases appear more parallel.

I really fear, sometimes," whispered Olga rather excitedly, "that Sophia may be my rival."

About this time, M. Birschoff, a puffy, stuffy old gentleman, addressed himself to Olga, and stood before her, talking of trifles for some time. He had a son, a heavy, dull young man, for whom he thought Olga would be a very good wife; but Olga did not think so, and never gave him any encouragement.

"If my son were here, now," said M. Birschoff, with a very polite smile, "he would compliment you on your looks quite in elegant terms; whereas I can only say in my plain way, I am glad to see you looking so well."

"I like the plain way best," said Olga. "The other way is very easily learnt."

"Indeed? Can you teach it me?"

"Oh yes, very easily. It is only to exchange the really true, right phrase for one much stronger; for instance, instead of telling me I look well, to tell me I look quite divine."

"Indeed? Well, Olga Ivanovna, you look quite divine."

"Ah, M. Birschoff, that won't do from you!"

"Why not?"

"Oh, anybody can tell at once it is not one of your own expressions."

M. Birschoff laughed; said he feared it might be

the case, and walked off to the next guest. Meanwhile, Helen's ears had done double duty; for while listening to M. Birschoff she had been unable to help overhearing, at the same time, the satirical remarks made by some ladies a little way off on her own and Olga's dresses; the want of style in the one, the extravagance of the other; followed by some strong censures on Olga's appearing in society at an age when unmarried young ladies were commonly never seen. Then followed local scandals, which Helen was too ignorant of the parties alluded to for her to be able to tell whether they were true or baseless; but the tone of the conversation was such as to give her a very low opinion of the speakers, and to make her think that the exclusion of young girls from frequent admission into such society was a very sensible arrangement. Meanwhile, the rooms were becoming very full, and very warm; and Helen secretly thought the evening was being spent in a very stupid manner.

"There is quite a little crowd of gentlemen in the ante-room," said she to Olga; "they appear to be doing something.—What?"

"Playing *rouge-et-noir*," said Olga. "Ah! there is Frederick among them!" And the colour mantled in her cheeks.

"Can he afford to gamble out of three roubles a month?" said Helen.

"Helen, I am quite sorry I told you of that; you make such an unkind and disagreeable use of it on every occasion. I dare say he wins. Doubtless he plays well, as he does everything well."

"No great merit," said Helen.

"If he plays at all," said Olga, "I think he had better play well than ill. He little thinks I am here. I wonder if he will see me." And she sighed. "Ladies cannot go into that ante-room, except to go away."

"Certainly not," said Helen. "There is not one lady there."

"Here he comes," whispered Olga, in a tremor of joy. "Ah no;—he is stopping to speak to Sophia. She will not tell him I am here; and he never thinks of looking this way. How perverse!"

She watched them, and grew pale.

"Cruel, cruel Sophia!" she presently murmured.

"She has given him her purse, however," said Helen, "and he has returned with it to the card-table."

"Helen, you are really too sharp-sighted. However, if that's the way Sophia steals him from me, much good may it do her! People are beginning to go away. Let us go."

Olga was in hopes Vassilivitch would see her as she passed through the ante-room. She was disappointed.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN OVERTURN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

AS they drove out of the gateway, they met another carriage coming in; and as neither of the coachmen chose to back, there was a violent altercation between them, and a stoppage for foot-passengers in the street, some of whom called loudly for the police.

"Excellent!" said Olga, laughing. "It is Sophia's empty carriage, which certainly ought to have given place to ours; so it will serve her coachman right if he is sent to the police station."

"But what will your friend do?"

"My *friend?*" repeated Olga scornfully. "My foe, rather. She will stand shivering in her white satin shoes on the steps, till she finds it wiser to return to the ante-room."

"But, Olga, is that a Christian way of speaking? Let us interfere."

"We *can't*," said Olga. "We have no gentleman with us, and we cannot put our heads out of cover,

for the wind cuts like a knife. Hear what a squabble is going on! I enjoy it amazingly. Hark! some one is speaking with authority, and very angrily."

"A policeman?" suggested Helen.

"No," said Olga with eagerness; "it is some one from the house—it sounds like Frederick—it *is* Frederick, I declare!—Ah, goodness; he is commanding *our* coachman to back, in order that Sophia's may pass. He knows not I am here. We will not! I will forbid it."

But at the same moment, the carriage backing awkwardly, and then jerking forward, caught a post, and overturned. Olga screamed, and Helen could not repress a hasty exclamation.

The tumult in the gateway was now violent—Vassilivitch's voice storming over all. Helen, who was undermost, presently felt Olga lifted off her, and then herself awkwardly extricated from the carriage. It was pitilessly cold, and there was Olga, in her transparent white and gold, shivering in the snow.

"Olga! is it you?" cried a voice joyfully; and the person who had extricated Helen, and who had been one of the foot-passengers detained by the carriages, hastily took off his cloak and threw it around her.

"The police will set up the carriage directly," said he; "but, meanwhile, you will catch your death."

"Henri! what a surprise!" exclaimed Olga. "Who would have thought of your being here?"

But at this moment Vassilivitch interposed—"Olga Ivanovna! is it possible?" cried he in a low voice. "What have I done? To me the accident is owing. Let me hasten to repair it."

"I can take care of this young lady, sir," said Henri haughtily; "you have done her harm enough already."

"What right have *you*, sir?" said Vassilivitch fiercely.

"The right of a kinsman, sir," said Henri, putting him aside with very little ceremony. "The carriage is set up now; make way that I may replace my cousin in it."

"*Is* he your cousin?" said Vassilivitch, again interposing between him and Olga.

"Yes, yes," said Olga hastily.

"Do you doubt my word, sir?" said Henri, putting him aside this time very roughly, and rapidly assisting Olga into the carriage. Vassilivitch was ready to foam with rage; but Henri, without paying the least attention to something very much like a buffet, handed Helen in, and then springing lightly into the carriage after them, closed the door himself, and laughed gaily as they drove out of the courtyard.

"Do I incommode you?" said he. "I had better see you safe home. I was on my way thither."

"Why, Henri, you surprise me beyond expres-

sion," cried Olga. "When did you reach St. Petersburg?"

"Just a week ago; and after seeing all at home, I came on here to see how you and my uncle were. I arrived here just in time, I think! Who was that whiskery rascal with his overbearing voice that shoved me about so!"

"You must not think badly of him," said Olga, embarrassed. "I know him very well; and as he did not know you, he did all for the best in inquiring whether you had a right to interfere."

"I like that!" said Henri contemptuously. "It was *he* who interfered, not I. I helped you out of the carriage. Did not I, madame?"—appealing to Helen.

"Mademoiselle, not madame," interrupted Olga. "Allow me to present you to my dear English friend and gouvernante, Helen May. Only think, Henri, what a delightful successor to old Madame Laporte!"

Henri bowed; and then resumed—

"But this whiskerandos, who is he?"

"Don't call him names, please," said Olga. "He is Frederick Vassilivitch."

"Hum! I only know of one of that name, and he does not do any credit to it."

"Of course, he is not the same, then," said Olga.

"The Vassilivitch I mean," pursued Henri, "is

the only son of old Vassili Strogonoff of St. Petersburg, who impoverished himself to give him an expensive education, which he requited by turning out a complete scamp."

"Ah, then it *is not* the same," said Olga.

"He holds a pitiful place under government," persisted Henri, "and runs dreadfully into debt; which he can only get out of by his winnings at play. By the by, he is related to the Strogonoffs, your old friends here—then, it *must* be the same."

"The Strogonoffs were friends once," said Olga, biting her lip, "but they are no great friends now—Witness their carriage driving against mine just now."

"Was it *theirs?* And you and Sophia Petrovna—"

"Sophia Petrovna and I have been in the same room together all this evening, and she never once spoke to me. There's a friend!"

"Well, but I don't know all the antecedents;—you may have slighted her first—Was it so? But, here we are! I had better not come in to-night, had I?" said Henri.

"Why not?" said Olga. "My father never welcomes any one very warmly; but I hope he is enough of a Russian to be glad to see his sister's step-son. We Russians have the character for hospitality, at any rate," said she, appealing to Helen.

"I won't wait to be asked twice, then," said Henri, springing out and offering his hand to each in turn. "Michael will run down to the inn for my valise, I dare say."

Olga smiled without speaking; and as the large scarlet shawl carelessly wrapped round her dropped off, Helen observed Henri start a little and hastily survey her from head to foot with extreme admiration. Olga, without noticing it, tripped into the drawing-room, where M. Boris was slumbering on a sofa drawn close to the stove.

"Papa, here's Henri!" cried she, playfully rousing him.

"Who? Henri?" said M. Boris, rubbing his eyes; and while he was kissing the young man three times on each cheek, Helen heard Olga give orders for rather a substantial supper to be served immediately, and for a room to be prepared for M. Brunoff.

They were soon seated round the supper-table, without any regard to the lateness of the hour; Olga laughing, talking, helping others and herself abundantly to cold veal and ham, and looking brilliantly pretty; while M. Boris, after a glass of liqueur, became comparatively quite lively.

"So Olga picked you up at Madame Birschoff's?" said he, pushing the liqueur-case to Henri, who silently put it aside.

"No, papa, it wasn't there," interposed Olga hastily. "In coming away, an empty carriage was driven against ours, we were overturned, and Henri, who happened to be passing, very kindly extricated us from our uncomfortable position, saw everything put to rights, and then saw us home."

"I am sure you ought to be very much obliged to him," said M. Boris, coolly; as if the obligation did not by any means extend to himself, either with respect to his carriage or his daughter. "Have you been long here, Henri?"

"Only this evening arrived, sir."

"But how long have you returned from your travels?"

"Barely a week, sir."

"You have been quite a traveller, these two years."

"Yes, sir, I have made acquaintance with England, France, Germany, and Italy, as well as with the shores of the Baltic."

"Seen nothing like old mother Russia, hey?"

"Nothing *like* her, certainly, sir."

"No, I thought not. Are we going to war with England, think you?"

"Well, sir, it seems like it, but I hope it may blow over."

"They had better not meddle with us, I think, hey? Ha, ha!"

"Nor we with them, sir."

"Do they seem much frightened?"

"Can't say I saw any signs of it, sir."

"No, I suppose not. M. John Bull, as he calls himself, is very fond of running his head against a stone wall."

"You forget, papa," said Olga, "that this cannot be a very agreeable hearing to Helen."

"Nor to any English ear, of course," said M. Boris, with a little apology for a bow—or a little bow for an apology. "However, it's what everybody will be talking of soon; if it comes to anything."

"Which I hope it will not," said Olga. "Well, papa, it is getting terribly late, so we will wish you good night. I hope you will find everything comfortable in your room, Henri. If not, Michael shall get his hair well pulled."

"Ah, we Russians are too ready at that," said Henri. "Do you know, I have lived so long in foreign parts, that I would rather shave with cold water than that Michael's hair should fly about the hall."

"What a barbarian you must have grown!" said Olga, laughing; and still standing near him, though as if about to go.

"Where's Alexis? Is he in the house?"

"Yes, he was always a favourite of yours, I remember. You shall have him for your attendant,

if you like, instead of Michael. But, Henri, he has grown quite a great gentleman since you were here! —quite a superior young man; papa makes him a sort of clerk—I'm afraid there must be no hair-pulling in that quarter."

"Luckily, there will be no need of it."

"Well, good night, Henri; good night!" And smilingly waving her hand to him, she glided off; he looking after her as if he had not seen anything so pretty and charming for a long while.

CHAPTER IX.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

"YOU seem to have engaged a very young governess for my cousin, sir," said Henri, when Helen had disappeared.

"A ruination governess," said M. Boris, helping himself to another glass of liqueur, and then putting in the stopper. "Take another glass, Henri? Why now," (getting up, as if Henri had declined any more refreshment, and putting his hands in his pockets,) "how much do you suppose she costs me?"

"It is impossible for me to say, sir. But, if she be capable of forming my cousin's mind and making it as lovely as her person, I should hardly think her dear at any price."

"Two thousand roubles a year!"

"Silver?"

"Paper."

"Very cheap, sir; if she fulfils the conditions."

"I am led to understand her to be completely accomplished—"

"Very young, though."

"But as steady as old Time."

"Then, sir, I think your two thousand roubles could not be better invested."

"But what a salary for so young a person! I determined to spare nothing for Olga's advantage—"

—"Thereby showing yourself, my dear sir, a very affectionate father."

"Affectionate! Yes! But she makes pretty hard pulls on my affection, too. That girl's bills, Henri, are enormous."

"I'm sorry for it, sir."

"She won't do for a poor man's wife."

"What does that signify, sir?"

"Hey?"

"You do not mean to marry her to a poor man, I suppose?"

"Certainly not. But there's many a needy man would like to snap her up."

"Doubtless, sir. And it was lest any unprincipled adventurer should take advantage of her inexperience, that I should have thought an older lady than Mademoiselle May, however virtuous and accomplished she might be, would have been a fitter protectress."

"Well, I may have been penny wise and pound foolish in this affair, after all," said M. Boris, somewhat uneasily.

"How so, sir?" said Henri, with surprise.

"Two ladies were proposed to me by my English correspondent; one of them equally well spoken of, for integrity and acquirements, had the additional advantage of being a widow lady of mature age, experienced in tuition, who had educated and introduced to the world three motherless girls of high rank."

"What could induce you, sir, to give her up for Miss May?"

"She wanted two thousand *silver* roubles."

"And Miss May was content with paper?"

"She was unaware of the difference."

Henri raised his eyebrows. The trait was so characteristic of M. Boris, that he said nothing.

"You are surprised," said M. Boris, mistaking the source of his expression. "You well may be. Do these English women receive such extortionate salaries in their own country?"

"Proportionately so, sir. You see, it is a long way to come. Russia is considered a semi-barbarous country by those who don't know anything about it. —I believe they think the bears and wolves come up to our very doors."

"Ha!"

"Miss May, if she be what she has been represented to you, would very likely command a salary of a hundred to a hundred and twenty guineas in her

own country; and something extra is expected for being expatriated—banished."

"I believe she supposed this little better than Siberia," said M. Boris, with a grim smile. "But I am amazed such young persons should command such salaries—far beyond those of many good government places."

"Ah, sir, and what do the officers who fill those places, know? Reading, writing, arithmetic, a little French, and a good deal of cheatery. It were injustice to place a first-class English governess on the same level. Often she will be found a thorough gentlewoman, in birth as well as education, descended from one of those old families who scorn to receive patents of nobility—perhaps the orphan of some officer or clergyman, carefully educated in all that it behoves a woman to know, without having had any ulterior view of imparting it to others. The youth of such a lady as Miss May is not always considered an objection in England. It is thought that the young have a peculiar facility of adaptation to the young; and the girls in happy English homes are so hedged in—"

"By walls?"

"No, by the moral restraints of goodness and purity, that, while their parents ward off all evil from without, their governesses need not to be lynx-eyed spies."

"You think, then, Mademoiselle May's youth no objection?"

"Hardly so, in England," said Henri doubtfully; "but this affair of the roubles shows her so ignorant of our ways and usages that she may be hardly equal to her task. Nothing like *espionage* finds place in an English home."

"Incredible!"

"Here, she may incautiously permit Olga to form dangerous acquaintances."

"My dear Henri, so did old Madame Laporte!"

"Indeed?"

"She never could gain the child's confidence—actually let her carry on a clandestine correspondence under her very nose!"

"Indeed?" cried Henri, alarmed. "With whom?"

"With Sophia Strogonoff."

"Oh!" drawing a deep breath of relief. "Better with her than with her cousin."

"What cousin?"

"Frederick Vassilivitch. He is quite a scamp. Lives no one knows how, except by bribery as an official, and by gambling as a man of fashion. I dare say he thinks a rich wife would set him up nicely.'

"He won't get one out of *my* house, though," said M. Boris, with a snort of disdain.

"Well, sir, I hope not."

"No, no; I'll take care of that. Not a letter or note passes in or out of this house without my knowing it. Any from that quarter, you may depend, would go into the fire. Why, now, it was I who detected the correspondence which Madame Laporte had overlooked."

"Surely, sir, *that* was not a very dangerous one?"

"No knowing, no knowing to what it might have led. And who do you think, of all the people least likely to be suspected, was the carrier of the letters to and fro?"

"Alexis?"

"No, no. Nicolas, the old ikon-seller, with his hypocritical bland face and flowing white beard. I had the hypocrisy well thrashed out of the old knave at the police-station, I promise you. There was no hypocrisy in the noise he made."

"Well," said Henri, with a sigh, "I am glad it was not Alexis, at any rate."

"Oh, Alexis has as yet done nothing worthy of stripes; or, at least, has not yet been found out. For, mark you, that is the utmost I can say of any one of my underlings. I have not the least opinion of the integrity of any one of them."

"What a pity!"

"Yes, truly it is: but we masters cannot help ourselves—"

"Don't you think, a different system—"

"No, no, no. No system, I tell you, will alter their wicked nature. There is not one good among them; no, not one."

"Theologically speaking—"

"I'm not speaking theologically, nor illogically either. And what do you think Olga said, when I charged her to her face with her clandestine correspondence? That if I put no confidence in her integrity, I must expect to find myself outwitted!"

"Rather bold—"

"Filial piety!"

"But yet, sir, you must make allowance for a poor motherless girl, left much to servants; and I am persuaded you *do*."

"Certainly I do," said M. Boris, with a little emotion in his voice; "and this is the way I am repaid for it."

"No, sir,—for your want of confidence in her, she said."

"Ah, well; don't let us talk any more about it. There's one thing I should like you to do while you are here—"

"What is that, sir?"

"You used to be playmates and great friends—get it up again, if you can, and win her confidence."

"Most happy, sir."

"Because," said M. Boris, tapping him em-

phatically on the chest with his forefinger, "I know you're safe."

"As the ice at Christmas, sir."

"Find out which way the wind is blowing,—do you mark me?—and let me know. It shall not be the worse for you—I have a match for her in my eye; not with a needy adventurer—no, no; with somebody worth his weight in gold, and true as gold—never mind his name. And, another thing—you speak English?"

"Fluently, sir."

"Be sociable, then, with Mademoiselle May; make friends with her; find out what she really is. It is highly important to know."

"It is indeed, sir. And I shall be very glad to know what she is, for my own gratification as well as yours. But the length of my stay here must necessarily be so short."

"Pooh, pooh; don't talk yet of going."

"No, sir; only, I fear, a week, or, at the utmost, a fortnight."

"Well, well, you must make the more use of your time."

"Yes, sir. And now I will say good night."

When Helen reappeared in the morning, it was to announce that Olga had a troublesome cold, and would keep her room.

"No wonder," said Henri, looking disappointed.

"It was dreadful for her to stand in the snow in that gossamer dress, and those thin satin shoes. Shall you send for the doctor?"

Helen smiled, and said she did not think Olga ill enough to need advice—or be very ready to take it.

"She talks of coming down by and by, wrapped in a shawl," said Helen.

"She had much better remain where she is," said Henri. "My advice is very disinterested, for I have many things I want to say to her. What think you of my English, Miss May?"

"It is excellent," said Helen. "Surely you must have been a long time in England?"

"You flatter. We Russians readily acquire languages."

"Because your own is so difficult, that all others appear easy?"

"It may be so. Do you find Russian difficult?"

"I have so little opportunity of hearing it. Olga almost constantly speaks French or English; it is only of my Russian maid that I can learn a little Russian; and I have some difficulty in understanding her."

"You will get on better, by and by. And, after all, it will be comparatively valueless to you, as French is universally spoken by the upper ranks."

"Yes; but I should like to have the power of talking with the lower ranks too."

"You are an Englishwoman, accustomed to visit poor cottages," said Henri, smiling.

"Certainly. I am a clergyman's daughter."

"Ladies do not trouble themselves, here, with much visitation of that sort."

"I am sorry to hear it. Why not?"

"Oh, the dwellings of the serfs are so dirty and fetid."

"Those are evils which the visits of ladies would tend to remove. It softens our hearts to see something of those beneath us."

"They do see something. In the summer-time the peasants come and dance on the lawn before their country-house windows."

"Ah, that is too theatrical. The poor people are naturally gay while their festa lasts, and afford no fair criterion of the habitual state of their minds."

"It is very low."

"Poor creatures! So I feared. How can it be otherwise in a slave country?"

"Wretchedness and sin are known in your country also, which is free."

"But not to the same extent. Have you ever been in Kent? I speak of that county, not as being better than others, but as that which I know best."

"I know parts of Kent. It is very rural; very beautiful. I saw the hop-picking there; it was

almost equal to the vintage. I visited some of the cottages; they were exquisitely neat and clean; the people seemed grave, busy, and happy in them. I saw the unions and workhouses; I saw no guitar-playing, nor dancing under the trees."

"No; that is not congenial to us. Somehow, dancing and morality never go hand-in-hand among our lower orders."

"Nor music?"

"Music is more cultivated than it was; but we are not an essentially musical people."

"How do you like our Russian airs?"

"Very much. They are chiefly plaintive, that I have heard. I am intending to make a collection of them."

"Will you allow me to write out a few for you? I have nothing particular to do this morning."

"I shall be much obliged to you. Here is music paper. Can you write them from memory?"

"Oh, yes; notes, words, and all, without even fingering them on a piano."

"You must be a good musician."

"No good comes of boasting. Perhaps I shall make some blunders, after all," said Henri, laughing, as Helen left him.

"She is a nice creature," thought he to himself, as he seized the pen, and began to connect the ruled lines with brackets. "Not so lovely as Olga, cer-

tainly, but very sweet-looking, nevertheless; unaffected, cheerful, dignified, and with a voice one would like to be in the habit of hearing all one's life. It will tone Olga's down: Olga frequently speaks in too high a key; she is vivacious; but cheerfulness is more lasting. Olga is the prettiest at sixteen; but Miss May will, perhaps, have the advantage of her at six-and-twenty. She is probably within a few years of that age, now? yet, how blooming she is! Not a mere apple-blossom complexion, but one that will last. And yet, she is quite old enough for Olga's companion. She will win her confidence; nay, it is clear she has it already, nearly unsought; yet there is such self-possession about her, that no one would dare to address her, or her pupil in her presence, otherwise than with respect. Who can be the fellow my uncle has his eye on for Olga, I wonder? Can it be my invaluable self? I fear my distinguished merits are not sufficiently recognised by the old gentleman, for that; and yet he looked very cunning: I'm glad I warned him against Vassilivitch—that fellow is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Hem! I am confusing the bass with the treble cleff."

Meanwhile, Olga, starting up from her pillow, as Helen entered was saying, "Have you been talking to Henri? What has he been saying? How do you like him?"

"You ask too many questions at once," said Helen. "I like the little I have seen of him very well."

"That is a horrid cold expression."

"Very much, then."

"He is not handsome, though, like Frederick."

"I infinitely prefer his looks, however. They are frank, intelligent, and good-humoured."

"Yes: and they completely index his character; he is such a pleasant person to have in the house! Is he going to stay?"

"I have heard no mention of going?"

"Oh, I dare say he will stay. I hope he will. That is, if I am able to come down before papa gives him a *congé*."

"M. Boris seems to like him, I think."

"Ah, papa likes nobody so well as his own bread and salt," said Olga, laughing. "He is quite an exception to the general rule, which is to welcome every new-comer like an angel, and be glad of his society as long as he will stay. Papa is just the one to say some day when we are all particularly comfortable together, 'Well, Mr. Henri, when must you return to St. Petersburg?'"

Helen laughed, for it sounded very much like the truth.

"But do tell me what he talked to you about," said Olga eagerly. "Of me?"

"No, not of you, after my telling him I did not think you ill enough to require a medical prescription."

"Cruel Helen!"

"I told him you talked of getting up; but he said you had much better remain where you were, though there were many things he should otherwise have liked to talk to you about."

"Then I shall certainly get up!" said Olga. "Don't hinder me! I *will* ring for Stephanie. Perhaps he will go out before I am dressed."

"No, he is writing music."

"Ah, so much the better. He has a very nice voice; you shall hear it by and by. I shall get up now, directly!"

CHAPTER X.

OFFICIOUS INTERFERENCE.

HENRI was still writing music when Olga and Helen, late in the afternoon, entered the drawing-room. He had been out in the interim, had lunched with some acquaintance, and, on his return, had drawn a little table close to one of the windows to avail himself of the remaining daylight.

"Dear Olga! I hope you are better this afternoon," said he, going to meet her, and affectionately taking her hand.

"Oh yes, much better, thank you," said Olga.

"You look flushed and heavy-eyed, however. You had better have remained in bed."

"What! when Helen told me you had a thousand things to talk to me about? Unreasonable!"

"The thousand things were of no importance; I could have waited."

"Does papa seem glad to see you this time?"

"Oh yes, he is quite cordial."

"That's right. I was so afraid he would send you off before I came down."

"On the contrary, he has asked me to stay a little while—long enough," said Henri, laughing, "to find out whether Miss May is real English, or only Scotch or Irish."

Helen laughed.

"That would be a pretty joke," said Olga. "Neither he nor I could find it out. *Are* you really English, Helen?"

"Really English," said Helen. "A maid of Kent."

"And pray how are you going to form my cousin's mind?" inquired Henri.

"I must *in*form it a little, to begin with," said Helen. "I find she has very cloudy ideas of the Thirty Years' War, and knows nothing of the Pragmatic Sanction."

"Is there any need of my knowing all these things, Henri?" said Olga.

"Great need, Olga."

"I am sure mamma never heard of them."

"Times are altered, now."

"Well, if you say so, I suppose I must submit. I really was going to rebel."

"Think how nicely the time will slip away in the summer, while you are going through a well-chosen course of reading."

"Aye; let us put it off to the summer. Helen was talking of beginning directly."

116240R

"The summer is a long way off," said Helen. "Before it comes, you may be able to translate little English books like Princess Sophia Mestchersky."

"Let them be pretty ones, and then I shall not mind it. You and I will take our books and work out of doors, Helen, when we go to Vogdolitch, and spend the mornings in the open air."

"That will be pleasant."

"Yes; only we shall want some nice person, like Henri, to hold our parasols, fetch us things from the house, and lie on the grass at our feet."

Helen smiled at this addition to their studies. "Could not Stephanie bring us things from the house?" said she.

"Ah, how insipid!" cried Olga. "Men always impart instruction best, and Henri's conversation is very improving. Is it not, Henri?"

"Not just now, I fear."

"You will come to us, won't you?"

"Unfortunately, I shall probably be tossing about on the Baltic: for it is likely the Emperor may give me a private mission."

"Ah, horrible! But what are your thousand things, Henri?"

"Well—to begin with the first that occurs to me. When I was here last, you and Sophia Ivanovna were sworn friends, always flying into each other's

arms, or walking about with your arms round each other's waists. What has put an end to all that?"

"The reason is," said Olga, coughing a little to cover her embarrassment. And, as sometimes happens, the feigned cough provoked a real one which could not easily be stopped. "There, I shall go on hacking in this way till I am quite exhausted, unless I am quiet for a little while," said Olga.

"I will go back to my music writing for ten minutes by my watch," said Henri, "and then talk to you instead of letting you talk to me. There is a little air I want to finish before it is quite dark."

He returned to his writing-table, while Helen took her crochet to the other window, and each of them was nearly hidden by the ample crimson curtains.

At this moment, Michael, looking rather bewildered, threw open the door, and in a blundering manner announced some name that sounded like Vassilivitch; hastily retreating, the moment he could close the door upon the visitor.

And Frederick Vassilivitch it was, who, impetuously approaching Olga, caught her hand, exclaiming, "Loveliest Olga, how can I ever atone—"

"I don't think you ever can, sir," said a cold, distinct voice from the nearest window; while Olga, blushing scarlet, hastily said, "Frederick—

M. Vassilivitch, you do not perceive my cousin," and withdrew her hand.

Vassilivitch darted a glance round the room that comprehended the other inmates, and, as soon as he saw Henri, offensively turned his chair almost with its back towards him, and addressed Olga again in a tone of intimacy that seemed to refuse to be repelled. She, overwhelmed with confusion, never raised her eyes: but with burning blushes almost inaudibly answered his inquiries, which were in reality of the most common-place kind. He made exaggerated expressions of regret at not knowing she was present at Madame Birschoff's the preceding evening, and at having caused her such an unpleasant accident; and repeated his tender inquiries with so little variation except in the inflections of his voice, that Olga, conscious of Henri's attention to all that passed, said, with a little annoyance, "You asked me that before."

Henri did not disguise a smile; but though Olga saw it, Vassilivitch did not. It cut one way, however. Meanwhile, Helen had left the window, and seated herself beside Olga. Vassilivitch found the sentimental *tête-à-tête* impracticable; he therefore began to talk in a gay and lively way, with a good deal of satire, of Madame Birschoff's entertainment, and the appearance, characters, and histories of several of her guests. It was just the amusing non-

sense that an empty young man often addresses to his partner of the preceding night; and Olga, having overcome her first fit of embarrassment, was fast yielding to his powers of entertainment, laughing at his jests, and now and then answering in the same vein, when Henri, suddenly pushing aside his writing-table, rang the bell so violently that Vassilivitch looked round.

As soon as Michael re-appeared, "Pray inform M. Boris," cried Henri to him, "that Frederick Vassilivitch is here; he will be so delighted to see him!"

The tone was so cheery, but its irony so well understood by every one present, that Helen had to struggle with an almost ungovernable disposition to laugh. But she fortunately was able to look stony cold, though not daring to raise her eyes from her work. As for Vassilivitch, he glared for a moment at Henri, as if he would slay him; and the next instant, as if resolved to do all he could with the present moment, he renewed his remarks to Olga, in a manner that redeemed them from insignificance, by melting tones, studied changes of attitude, and looks of seductive admiration. He was listening, however, for an approaching step; and as soon as he could retreat without being manifestly driven from the field, he rose, bowed gracefully over Olga's hand; more distantly to Helen; and then, looking at Henri

full in the face, without the least attempt at courtesy, stalked out of the room.

Henri burst into a fit of laughter before Vassilivitch could have been out of ear-shot. Olga looked exceedingly angry.

"Thank me, dear Olga, as you ought," cried Henri triumphantly, "for helping you out of your difficulty."

"Thank you?—for what, pray?" cried Olga. "For behaving with unpardonable rudeness?"

"No, no; nothing of the sort. For civilly, but decidedly, getting rid of an impertinent fellow, disagreeable to you and to my uncle, who had no business to intrude."

"He is not at all disagreeable to me," said Olga; "and I think it was quite due to me that he should call to inquire how I was, even if my father does not like him much."

"Like him much? Why, my dear Olga, my uncle says he shall never, if he can help it, cross his threshold."

"So you have been talking it over with papa!" cried Olga, with flashing eyes. "Really, you have lost no time! Is it not too bad, Helen?"

"If you ask me," said Helen gently, "I must say that, though I wondered at M. Brunoff's coolness, I think he well acquitted himself of a disagreeable office."

"Thanks, Miss May," said Henri, laughing.

"I see nothing to laugh about," said Olga, still highly incensed. "What right have you, pray, to interfere with my visiting acquaintance?"

"Only the right of an affectionate cousin, who knows a little more of the world than you do. Ha! ha!—ho! ho! How the fellow looked when I said my uncle would be so glad to see him!" And Henri roared with laughter.

Olga burst into a passionate fit of tears. Henri was checked directly. He drew near, and would have taken her hand; but she repulsed him with indignation.

"How could I tell," said he, in an expostulating tone, "that you cared seriously for him?"

"Wait till I say I do," replied she, struggling with her sobs.

"But, Olga, you are unreasonable," interposed Helen. "First you are angry with your cousin for treating M. Vassilivitch as a person in whom you have no interest, and next for supposing you have any."

"Just so," continued Henri; "for knowing you so well, I took it for granted you felt nothing but dislike and contempt for a man of his notorious character."

"You are envious of him," said Ogla, drying her eyes.

"Envious? Ho! ho!"

"You may laugh as scornfully as you like, but I know it is so."

"I *must* want somebody to be envious about."

Michael here re-appeared, and announced that M. Boris had gone out.

"No matter," said Henri quietly; "the occasion for him is past."

In the evening Olga went to the pianoforte, and played polkas and galops; but she would not ask Henri to sing, nor would she play over the airs he had written out, to see if they were correct; excusing herself on the plea that her cold made her eyes weak. Henri was, or seemed, very little annoyed by her slights; he knew they were reprisals for his offences against Frederick Vassilivitch: and while she, wrapped in her shawl, and sitting nearly in the dark, continued to play for her own selfish amusement, he made spills, and sat beside Helen at her work.

"How miserable that poor dog Alexis is," said he at length, in a low voice.

"Is he?" said Helen with surprise. "I have scarcely seen him since my journey; for he is generally at the office."

"Stephanie has used him abominably, and flirted with Kostia, which has almost driven Alexis mad; and, to turn the tables on her, he has paid attentions

to Annouchka, for whom he does not care a straw; which has widened the breach almost past repair. Olga will be glad of it—"

"Olga!" repeated Helen.

"Oh, yes," continued Henri, quietly but resentfully. "Olga wants to keep Stephanie's services to herself, and therefore is resolved that she shall not marry. There's a soft-hearted young lady for you!"

"I fear there is something of this feeling."

"Fear it? I know it! She would own it directly if we taxed her with it, and burst into a fit of laughter at the idea of its being wrong. Nor should I have thought so much of it two years ago. But do put a softer nature into her if you can."

"Yes, if I can," repeated Helen, sighing; "but the task is so difficult. Early habits, national customs, and, above all, inconsideration, are so hard to make successful war with."

"As for Alexis, I have told him he may rely on it that Stephanie is true to him in her heart, and only coquettes to draw him on to make an offer. He says, where's the good, when he dares not marry? I have told him, at any rate not to trifle with Annouchka, or he will make three miserable instead of two. He has promised to desist."

"What are you two plotting about?" cried Olga, suddenly starting up and joining them.

"Your good, of course," said Henri.

"Comparing notes of my faults, I suppose. Much good may you derive from it! It will do *me* none."

"Not if you resolve it shall not. We were talking of some persons you think infinitely beneath you."

"For example?"

"For example, Alexis."

"Poor Alexis! He's a nice fellow."

"Much you care for him!"

"I care a great deal—I think very highly of him."

"That's your opinion of him, not your interest in him. You don't want to make him happy."

"What, by marrying Stephanie? Why now, you unreasonable Henri!—you profess, I know, to have an interest in *me;* and yet, would you have any patience with me, if—if *I* wanted to do anything as unreasonable as Stephanie does?"

"For example, if you wanted to marry Frederick Vassilivitch?" said Henri, looking full at her. Olga blushed scarlet.

"For the sake of argument, yes!" said she hardily.

"No, Olga; because I know he would make you miserable."

"So would Alexis make Stephanie miserable, if he married her without our consent, and if they were both cast out of house and home."

"The cases are not parallel, Olga. Vassilivitch is a man of bad character."

"That rests only on your assertion, Henri."

"Do you doubt my assertion?"

"Yes, because you are prejudiced."

"Why should I be prejudiced?"

She raised her eyebrows, but made no reply.

"Enough," said he impatiently. "I see we can never agree."

And he challenged M. Boris, who appeared just waking up, to a game of preference.





CHAPTER XI.

UNEXPECTED DISAPPEARANCE.

"WHERE'S Henri?" said Olga, the next morning at breakfast.

"Gone," said M. Boris coolly.

"Gone?" repeated she with a little start.

"Yes; he has been recalled to St. Petersburg by the Emperor."

"But, how sudden!—how strange, not to wait to say farewell!"

"You are so late. We have had our letters an hour or more. And Ivan Iakomovitch being about to start at the same time, and offering him a seat in his britschka, they went off together."

"That dull Ivan Iakomovitch!" muttered Olga to herself. "He *has* a companion, indeed! I would rather have gone alone. Well; we shall be rather stupid for a day or two, and then go on just as if he had never been here. It does not in the least signify."

She was petulant, however, all the morning, and would settle to nothing. Helen beheld the task

before her with something like dismay. At length, Olga made Stephanie bring down all her ball-dresses, and receive an infinite number of directions about their alteration. Stephanie suggested that some of the changes were impossible; Olga called her stupid, and appealed to Helen.

"My dear Olga," said Helen, "I came hither to direct your studies, not to superintend your wardrobe."

"Bah!" cried Olga crossly, "every one is against me. Carry the things away, Stephanie, and do as I have desired."

Stephanie had scarcely obeyed when Michael announced Alexandra Pavlovna, who proved to be one of the gossipping ladies whose conversation had displeased Helen at Madame Birschoff's party. She now appeared brimful of some piece of intelligence she was very desirous to communicate; for people who have little information of a better sort are generally very fond of news.

"Well, have you heard what has happened?" said she, as soon as a few prefatory inquiries had been answered.

"No," said Olga, rousing up; "what is the matter?"

"Ah, poor Constantine Petrovitch! That horrid Frederick Vassilivitch had words with him at the billiard-table last night, and shot him this morning."

"Dead?" cried Olga, turning very white.

"Yes, most likely by this time, though not quite so when he was brought home, all steeped in blood—only fancy! Madame Birschoff in fits—her husband in despair—the priest sent for."

"The doctor too, I hope," said Olga. "Dear me, we must send and inquire. And what has become of Frederick Vassilivitch?"

"Oh, he made off directly, of course, the wretch! We shall hear nothing of him again in this neighbourhood for some time to come, rely on it."

"The Strogonoffs must be very much shocked."

"Sophia Petrovna doubtless is. Some even think her secretly married to him. Did you see her give him her purse the other night? Her father would never give his consent, and therefore they are probably awaiting his death, which cannot be far off."

"That is too scandalous," cried Olga indignantly, "and I really think you ought not to spread such slanders."

"You are very young, and don't know how bad the world is," said Alexandra, smiling. "Well, I only ran in for a moment, and must not stay."

When she was gone, "This is the way she will run in and out of the house of every one she knows," said Olga, "to secure the first telling of this terrible affair. Kostia shall go immediately and

inquire how M. Birschoff's son is—he is no great favourite of mine, but I should be much shocked at his dying; especially by the hand of Frederick Vassilivitch.' Alexandra may be right in saying I do not know how bad the world is; but I can see it to be bad enough already, or slander and scandal would not be such frequent resources. Perhaps Constantine Petrovitch will prove to be not so much hurt, after all; and Frederick may not have fled. I am certain he has not married Sophia; nor would she be so unfeeling as to be anticipating her good old father's death. On the whole, I am rather glad than otherwise that Henri is away."

M. Birschoff's son proved to be dangerously wounded, and Vassilivitch had really disappeared, leaving all his bills unpaid; so that Olga, whose affection for him sprang much more from the imagination than the heart, hearing him universally ill-spoken of and Constantine commiserated, found very little *éclat* attach itself to her preference, and became rather disgusted with it herself. As long as Constantine Petrovitch remained in danger, she could settle to nothing; and was particularly annoyed at the reports of visitors. Helen was not sorry for it, thinking it a useful though premature lesson in the experience of life; and she privately rejoiced that the duel had been fought on so sordid a pretext as a money-quarrel, rather

than about Olga, to whose future alliance both were considered aspirants. Her feelings and her self-importance might have been dangerously excited; whereas annoyance was what she now chiefly suffered; and she appeared, for the time, so thoroughly awakened to the perception of the vices of society, and so weary of hearing of them and mixing in them, that Helen considered the opportunity a favourable one for enforcing the claims of a more profitable life.

She proved to be in the right. Olga, after a severe nervous attack, during which Helen showed her the kindest consideration, suddenly manifested a great eagerness to do and be whatever Helen desired, and to put herself completely under her guidance.

"Make me like yourself, if you can," said she, "for you are loveable and good. If you will not mind the trouble, neither will I."

Olga was truly in earnest; and in a short time a system of useful and improving occupation was established between them, which supplied such high and pleasant stimulus that Olga became comparatively indifferent to the trifles which had hitherto amused her. They worked together, read together, talked of what they read, and of the national differences of their respective countries; sang and played duets, and studied each other's languages.

"I begin to like these books of yours better than French novellettes," said Olga. "But to what good all these acquirements, which no one else will appreciate or care about?" And she sighed.

"Study them for their own sake," said Helen. "It must be a poor acquirement that does not repay us many times over for the trouble of making."

Helen wished to awaken and cherish in her a spirit of active benevolence. It seemed strange to her that it should *need* awakening; that Olga should hitherto only have cared for herself and a very few favourites; only nominally for the mass of her acquaintance, and not at all for the poor.

To kindle in her some interest in her dependants, Helen dwelt frequently on her previous English country life, and cottage visitation. Olga frequently listened with perfect indifference to allusions to feeding the hungry and clothing the naked; but all at once she seemed inspired by a great desire to distinguish herself by acts of mercy, and to make clothes for ragged little moujiks.

"I do believe," she one day exclaimed, "that you and Apollonia Mikhailovna would suit each other exactly!"

"Who is Apollonia Mikhailovna?"

"The most eccentric old lady in the world. I beg your pardon, Helen, but she really *is* different from everyone else. She is a widow, who lives

near our country-seat, in an old white wooden house with green shutters, surrounded by linden-trees. Whether other people will not visit her or she will not visit them, I know not, but very few ladies go near her; nor does she seem to care about being consigned to comparative solitude, though she is very cheerful and chatty when any one drops in on her—now and then, however, saying very severe things."

"In what does her eccentricity consist?"

"She reads many books that you, or at least I, never heard of. She never touches medicine herself, but gives plenty to any who ask for it, and is looked upon as quite an eminent physician by the moujiks. She has two summer and two winter gowns, which she buys alternate years, and wears them by turns till they are completely worn out. She always wears a bonnet indoors, the shape of which was certainly never seen in Paris. She knits leggings and muffatees for her little serfs; allows no flogging, keeps her own accounts, makes all her people attend divine worship; sings hymns, and accompanies her voice on the balalaika. Her orchard is full of fruit-trees; and she gives every moujik, on his marriage, three or four apple, pear, and cherry-trees for his garden, that bear fruit the third year."

"No wonder you think her eccentric, Olga."

"Because she gives a premium for marriage, you

mean. Ah well, her three *babas* are quite old maids; and Peoter is grey-headed. If any of them married, I doubt if they would get pear-trees. They might, though—she is so very eccentric!"

"Well, it seemed at first a doubtful compliment to me to say you thought we should suit one another; but your definition of her eccentricity prevents my feeling affronted."

"Yes, yes; I am sure you will be mutually pleased, though Madame Laporte could not endure her. I will take you to call on her when summer comes. I am hardly a favourite of hers; at any rate, she says very unpalatable things to me sometimes, but so kindly that it is impossible to take offence."

At dinner-time, to the surprise and pleasure of Helen, M. Boris brought home an English gentleman of the name of Howard. He was the stranger who had looked on at the funeral of Alexis's grandmother.

What he had heard on that occasion from the bystanders had not given him a very favourable impression of M. Boris; but as he happened to have some business to transact with him, and was desirous of acquiring some insight into the domestic life of the Russians, he willingly accepted M. Boris's invitation, without expecting much pleasure to accrue from it beyond the satisfaction of his curiosity.

What were his surprise and gratification on being

introduced, not only to the young and lovely daughter of his rugged host, but to a countrywoman of his own, young, intelligent, and a lady!

At table, though he performed its courtesies to Olga, and gave her the admiration of the eye, it was Helen to whom he involuntarily yielded the attention of the ear.

"You have, perhaps, visited the grave of your distinguished namesake?" said Helen.

"I have," he replied; "though it was a long journey to Cherson."

"Who was he? whom are you speaking of?" said M. Boris; to whom Mr. Howard explained that an English philanthropist, and reformer of lazarettos and prison discipline, had fallen a victim to his humanity in attendance on a young Russian lady, and was buried at Cherson.

M. Boris seemed to have a vague remembrance of it, but to think it very little worth remembering.

"Do you ever winter at St. Petersburg?" said Mr. Howard to Olga.

"Alas! no," said Olga, sighing: "I have never yet seen even Moscow more than twice, though it is only a hundred and eighty versts from us; but papa half promises I shall spend the next winter at St. Petersburg with my aunt."

"This is a fine city enough to content rational people, I think," said M. Boris, appealing to his guest.

"It looks well at a distance," said Mr. Howard reluctantly; "but the approach is bad, through the interminable and squalid suburbs; and the city itself looks deserted."

"We have fifty thousand inhabitants, though," said M. Boris.

"I understand that is your population; but no one would think it."

"Our public buildings are fine."

"Well, you have a good many blue and green cupolas and spires; some Grecian façades and flights of steps; one or two large hospitals, and a good many manufactories—that is all. The arms you manufacture here are very inferior to ours. Altogether I am disappointed."

"What more would you have?" said M. Boris—"palaces, perhaps, and a better theatre; but yet, for a provincial city, we do very well. What would you have?"

"Better lighting and paving."

"Well—there might be an improvement; but it would cost money, sir—it would cost money."

"I would have a better fire-brigade; hardly a night passes without a destructive fire."

"Yes, because our houses are of wood."

"Then they would be better of brick or stone."

"Of course, of course," said his host; "just as

a moujik would be better if he were a bârin; but the moujik does very well as he is, nevertheless."

"Does he?" said Mr. Howard, with an amused look at Helen, who did not think it safe to return it.

"Ah; you come from a country of democrats," said M. Boris.

"Pardon me; ours is a limited monarchy."

"Very limited indeed! Ha, ha, ha! But with plenty of democrats in it, for all that. I call yours a vulgar sort of government. You know, Buonaparte called you a nation of shopkeepers."

"A stale joke, now," said Mr. Howard coolly: "it will not excuse your serf system."

"If our serf system is all you have to say against us," said M. Boris, "we who reap the advantage of it can smile, and let your objection pass."

"Mr. Howard does not look as if it *were* all," said Olga, laughing.

"Oh no," returned he, in the same light tone, though taking advantage of it to pursue the subject; "higher up, things are as bad, or worse. The universal system of bribery, the wresting of justice, no open courts, no oral testimony, no written testimony valid without a stamp, to the enormous profit of government. Why now, to-day, you may believe me, I give you my word, M. Boris, when I say that this Elias Gregorieovitch owes me fifteen

hundred roubles, which I placed in his hands before I went to Cherson. I have stated the fact in a writing duly stamped, and presented it to the proper division of the civil court. After waiting a month, to my great inconvenience, I am told that my document is not worthy of attention, being written on the wrong sort of paper. I appeal on another kind, which is sold to me for the right sort—I do this three times, and each time my appeal is rejected on the same pretext: and, on applying to you for information how to act, you advise me as a friend to offer a considerable bribe—"

"A douceur! a douceur!" interposed M. Boris.

"You may call it a douceur, but it is nothing short of a bribe—which, in a word, I never will give."

M. Boris burst into a fit of laughter, and then replied, "You will wait long enough, then, for your fifteen hundred roubles."

"We shall see," said Mr. Howard.

"Yes, my dear sir, we shall see, we shall see; but you had better look on the thing as a little per centage—"

"A per centage! For what? For having been cheated?"

"A fee, that time has made it habitual to expect. This is a dull subject to discuss before ladies."

"Your censures of us are sweeping," said Olga,

diverting the war into her own quarter. "Is there nothing, then, in Russia, that you will praise?"

"Oh yes," said he, bowing and smiling, "the beauty of the Russian ladies."

"I thought," said Olga, looking towards Helen, "that the English ladies bore away the palm."

"If such compliments are passing from one to the other," said Helen, "it is time for us to run out of hearing."

Olga smiled, and rose from table.

During the evening Mr. Howard conversed agreeably enough for both his female auditors to hope they might see him again. It was very pleasant to Helen to talk to some one who knew many persons and places familiar to her; and Olga forgot her desire to shine, in the pleasure of listening to their animated conversation. The nine months' winter was now nearly half got through; during the remainder of it Mr. Howard called on them frequently; for, much to his chagrin, he found himself unable to carry his point of getting his appeal attended to without recourse to bribery and corruption. At length, sorely against his will, he gave the required douceur: in consequence of it Elias Gregorieovitch was officially informed that he was charged by John Howard with keeping back from him fifteen hundred roubles. Elias denied the fact; Mr. Howard had then to produce his witnesses, whose depositions were taken

down on stamped paper, subject to the same objections as the first. He now became curious, as an observer of national character and customs, to see how far this would go. At M. Boris's recommendation, (he, be it observed, being connected with the same office,) he again offered douceurs, which were again accepted. The case then went before the president and councillors of the court, but the decision was still deferred; and M. Boris hinted to Mr. Howard that this was because the president was being bribed by Elias. Mr. Howard, determined to carry the matter through, outbribed Gregorieovitch just at the last moment, and the decision was made in his favour.

But now came the worst. Elias Gregorieovitch actually *could* not pay the debt; and there was no alternative for him but Siberia. Mr. Howard's heart bled for him. What! doom a debtor to Siberian exile for a paltry sum of money, equivalent to about three hundred pounds English? He could not. He must upbraid the fellow in the strongest terms, let him go, and pocket the loss—as, indeed, he would have to do either way. So he had lost his douceurs, time, and temper, in addition to the original sum. And Elias went his ways with a light heart, and was soon well to do in the world again, with a poor wretch or two under him, to beat as much as he liked, and threaten with Siberia.

While this affair was still pending, Helen became seriously annoyed at the loss of several small articles, which she was convinced were purloined by Fedosia. As she had been extremely kind to this girl, she was the more hurt at it, yet hardly knew how to proceed, not having made sufficient progress in Russian to make her remonstrances as effective as she could wish, and knowing that if she called in the aid of Olga, the case would be much more severely dealt with than she desired.

While she was in this uncertainty, the loss of a pair of hair-bracelets, which her mother had given her, and to which only Fedosia could have had access, disturbed her so much, that she resolved to apply to Olga, taking the precaution of exacting a promise from her beforehand, that she should exercise no more rigour than Helen deemed absolutely necessary. She had just come to this determination, when Olga, looking pleased and a little fluttered, came up to her, with a letter in her hand, and, sitting down beside her, put her arm round Helen's waist.

"Only see!" said she, "here is a note from Henri to me, enclosed in a letter to papa, who has given it to me at once, without even breaking the seal. He has never written to me before, and I don't know why he should now; but, at all events, there can be no secrets in it; and if there were,

I have none from you; so you shall hear what he says."

And breaking the seal, she just glanced down the page, and then read as follows in English:—

"Off Cronstadt, Feb. 18.

"DEAR OLGA,

"It was very unmannerly to leave you in the way I did, without stopping to say farewell; but the Emperor's summons admitted of no delay, and I was glad to be sped on my way by even such a stupid companion as Ivan Iakomovitch. Once in St. Petersburg, there was plenty to keep me there till I received my instructions; and now here we are, frozen up off [illegible] island, which our great Peter chose as the fitting site for the nursery of a young and the stronghold of a matured navy. But I am not going to enlarge to you upon dockyards, arsenals, and harbours. I want to write about yourself. You know very well, dear Olga, I have always felt a brother's interest in you; which has, perhaps, made me lynx-eyed, rather than blind to your little deficiencies and infirmities. You could get nothing but outward polish from that old intriguante, Madame Laporte; but Miss May will, if you will let her, make you all that is amiable and estimable in woman. Dear Olga, be good, be docile! Such as you are, you are already secure of being loved; but you will be loved

and esteemed too, by a higher class of minds than you now aspire to captivate, if you will but be ruled by just principle, right feeling, and good sense. Miss May, being so attractive and conciliating, will make this the easier to you. I hope to come to my uncle's, for a little snipe-shooting, in the course of the summer, and then to find you pursuing a steady course of self-improvement. But it is not only the conduct of your understanding I am thinking of; you have already many human beings dependent on you, and hereafter will probably have many more. Think how you shall answer to God for your care of them. I don't mean by knitting leggings for the little moujiks, and giving brandy and tea to their fathers and mothers. This is all very well, as far as it goes, but it only costs a little money and trouble. Do not leave hearts to ache or break when it depends on yourself; nor, by impatience and passion, cause unnecessary personal chastisements to be inflicted, which only debase the mind and harden the disposition. Miss May will tell you Who has said, 'These ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone.' Farewell, dear Olga; I am sure you have had enough of my preaching. I shall tell my uncle I have sent you a little sermon, and then he will respect the seal.

"Your affectionate Cousin,

"HENRI ILLARIONOVITCH BRUNOFF VALENSKI."

"It *is* a sermon, but yet a very kind one," said Olga, when she had finished, "and I am very much obliged to him for sending it. But 'higher minds?'—ah, dear Helen! he must know as well as I do, that there are none such here, and that if I aim at all these good things, it must be for their own sake, and nothing lower. But I will!"

"And you will be rewarded," said Helen, kissing her. Their looks and tones were so full of emotion that they hardly heard Mr. Howard announced.

"Young ladies kissing in a morning?" said he whimsically.

"Why not in the morning as well as at any other time of the day?" cried Olga gaily.

"Why not, truly," he replied, "but I never knew such kissing people as you Russians, from the Emperor to the moujik. You never see a couple of shaggy fellows meeting in the street, without their bestowing on each other three kisses on the right cheek and three on the left."

"What of that?" said Olga, amused.

"Well, it looks stupid, I think. I can't bear the custom myself, and always say, 'Stand off.' I shall get a challenge or two for it some of these days, I know, but I can't help it."

"How goes your cause?" said Helen.

"The decision is to be made this morning, and I

have a thumping douceur in my pocket to slip into the president's hand at the very last moment."

"Oh!"

"Aye, you may well say 'oh;' but it's actually the only way. I shall show it all up in my book."

"Are you writing a book?" said Olga.

"To be sure I am. That's my only compensation. I have a gloomy joy in making the worst of things."

"Take care of what you say. The police will have their eye upon you."

"Do you think me unaware of that? I believe they supervise every word I write, between my going to bed and my getting up. I make it perfectly easy to them; leave my key in the lock, or on the top of my desk."

"Are you not afraid?" said Helen.

"Why, you don't suppose I keep my journal in a way they can comprehend, do you? No, no! when I mean black, I write white, and for mum, I put budget."

Helen and Olga laughed at this novel expedient. He said he would make the London publishers pay for his revelations so handsomely, that even if he failed to recover his debt, he would be into pocket; for the worse case he was able to make out, the more he should expect for it.

"Especially," said he, "now that a misunder-

standing between the two countries seems pending; we shall say of one another the bitterest things we can. No foes like old friends!"

"That is true enough," said Olga, thinking of Sophia Petrovna and herself.

"I must be off," cried Mr. Howard, starting up; "or Elias Villainovitch will get ahead of me after all!"

And laughing, he hurried away.

When Olga reverted to Henri's letter, she said that she believed he had written it chiefly for the sake of Stephanie and Alexis; and that she would think the subject over, though she meant to take no step in a hurry.

"Then, since you are so reasonable," said Helen, "I will mention to you a difficulty of my own." And she told her of the suspected dishonesty of Fedosia.

Olga would have resorted to extreme measures; but knowing that Helen would not like them, she simply proposed finding a substitute for Fedosia, who should be sent back to her village.

Though Helen would have preferred some reformatory system, she knew it to be out of her reach, and therefore acceded to Olga's proposal, with thanks for so easy a remedy.

Accordingly, before dark, Fedosia, to her no small surprise and dismay, found herself in a rickety old

telega, on her way back whence she came, with a small deal box beside her, the contents of which had been duly searched before her departure, and a smelling-bottle, her last appropriation, withdrawn therefrom and restored to its owner. The hair bracelets, however, which Helen cared for much more, were not found.

Olga was convinced, probably with reason, that "a good beating or hair-pulling" would have obtained a confession of the fate of the stolen goods, if not their restoration; but Helen was too much of an Englishwoman to seek to regain them on such terms; so the question was dropped.

The culprit's place was supplied, by return of telega, by a young girl called Axinia.

CHAPTER XII.

SPRING.

SPRING came at last. The ice broke up, the snow gradually disappeared, the roads and streets became masses of black mud, and the pent-up odours of the winter made the vitiated air almost pestilential. Water began now to ooze through crannies that had heretofore been imperceptible, everything felt damp and clammy, and the heat of the stoves was nearly insufferable. Helen heard of loaded vehicles sticking fast in the street-mire; of others being dug out; and of ladies, bent on pleasure at any price, being dragged to theatres and evening-parties by oxen harnessed to their carriages.

The Easter festivities amused her. She had been surprised at the length and rigour of the previous fast of eight weeks; but every one seemed resolved on compensation for it afterwards. As a matter of curiosity, or rather of interest, she accompanied Olga once or twice, as a spectatress, to the Greek church; though it had been an understood thing,

before she left England, that she should be allowed the free exercise of her own religion, and that Olga, on Sundays and saints'-days, should have another chaperon. The matins are between four and five in the morning; the Liturgy, or Communion-service, between nine and ten. No seats are provided; for all the congregation stand, except during prostration. The greater part of the service consists of psalms and hymns, occasionally sung, but most frequently read; and the extreme length of the service induces the priests to read so fast, that it is scarcely possible to follow them. Only vocal music is admissible; but this is often most exquisitely performed. When Helen entered the cathedral, which, though inelegant, is one of the most massive in Russia, the gorgeous effects of colour, of light and shade, the sumptuous dresses of the priests, composed of gay-coloured brocades, richly embroidered, and glittering with gems, the glare of some hundred wax-lights and lamps of various sizes, the fumes of incense, the strains of exquisite music, and the sight of crowds of worshippers, standing or prostrating themselves till their foreheads touched the pavement, was almost overpowering to her. Little addressed itself to the soul, but everything to the senses.

On the first of May, though it happened to be a cold day, every one threw off their winter furs, and appeared in the gayest spring fashions. The mer-

chants' wives, especially, in the brightest and richest silk brocades, loaded with real or mock jewels, and painted red and white in the most flagrant manner, were to be seen driving about with their sedate-looking husbands in the old national costume; who, leaving their wives to compete with each other in dress, only sought to rival one another in the beauty and pedigree of their horses.

Helen longed for the country, and for the first recognition of the violet and nightingale in their native woods; but business delayed M. Boris in town rather longer than was expected.

At length preparations began to be made for the flitting to Vogdolitch, and every one bustled about the house with an air of gaiety; nor were the preparations hastened without reason, for the Russian summer comes in so suddenly, and lasts so short a time, that delays are inexpedient. Neat travelling boxes were produced out of store-closets, compactly fitted up with cups, saucers, plates, tumblers, knives and forks, for the road—as such luxuries would not be attainable by the wayside. The distance, indeed, to M. Boris's country-house was only eighty versts, one long day's journey; but they must eat, though they need not sleep, upon the road. Many of the servants seemed to rejoice in going to the country, where they would see their parents, brothers, and sisters; but Stephanie wore a face of settled melan-

choly, for Alexis was to be left behind. Alexis had become very useful to M. Boris in his office, and was to sleep in it, and take care of it during his master's absence. Hence Stephanie's dejection; but Olga told Helen, with great glee, that she had thought the matter well over, and was preparing for Stephanie a pleasant surprise. She had resolved to tell her that she would no longer withhold her consent to her marriage; but did not mean to do so till the day before their journey. "And then," she added, "I shall have her services all the summer; but she and Alexis will have something to look forward to—so all parties will be satisfied."

Helen was very glad of this; but every time she saw Stephanie's drooping head and listless mien, she wondered how Olga could forbear to end her painful state of mind. However, Olga was quite satisfied with her own good intentions, and would have been very much surprised had she been told she was doing less than the utmost that could be expected of her.

On the evening but one before their departure, Alexis came in to receive some directions from Olga. His manner was respectful, but dry and cold; there was not the slightest appearance of personal attachment to his young mistress; there was no frown on his brow, but there was no smile on his lip. As he went out, he sighed.

"I could not forbear dispelling that sadness another hour, in your place," said Helen.

"*Ça ira demain*," was Olga's cheerful reply.

"We may all be burnt in our beds to-night," observed Helen.

They were not, however; and the next morning she met Stephanie in the corridor, with eyes wet with happy tears. On descending the stairs, she met the usually quiet Alexis, looking *hors de lui-même*.

"Pardon, pardon, Mademoiselle!" cried he, following her in an agitated manner into the breakfast-room. "Olga Ivanovna is going to make us happy; and I know—yes, I could swear—it is through your intervention."

And Alexis wept. Snatching her hand, and kneeling, he kissed it many times, and hurried away.

Olga next appeared, all smiles; and when M. Boris entered, she danced up to him, and kissed him.

"You are quite demonstrative this morning," said he coolly.

"Yes, papa, because I feel very happy. I have, I believe, performed a good action."

"Humph!"

"I have told Stephanie, papa, that I will consent to her marrying Alexis."

"Ho!—And has Alexis's master told him he may marry Stephanie?"

"You will, I hope, papa, will you not?"

"Child, even Stephanie is no property of yours, but of mine. You are not even of age. Your haste is somewhat premature."

Not another word would he speak all breakfast-time.

Helen felt quite dismayed; and Olga seemed a little thrown out, but not much. "He can't bear any one to take a liberty," whispered she. "Not even me. Otherwise, I know it to be a matter of perfect indifference to him, whether Stephanie marries or not. He has told me often, that it entirely depended on me."

Presently, while M. Boris was still reading the newspaper, Olga went to the window, and, smiling, beckoned to Helen to join her. Looking into the court-yard, Helen saw Alexis and Stephanie standing together in the secure privacy, as they thought it, of an archway; he with his arm passed round her waist, and talking to her with great animation, to which she was listening with an attentive ear, till, happening to look up, she caught a glimpse of Olga's blue muslin, and, blushing like a rose, darted into the house.

M. Boris, at the same moment, rose and went away; and Helen began to pack up her music. Suddenly, Alexis, white as marble, looked into the room, and clasping his hands, threw himself before Olga.

"Oh, Olga Ivanovna! If you love your mother's

[redacted]

[redacted] fearful [redacted] now [redacted] imagine [redacted] it. [redacted] Stephano [redacted] be by yours."

"It is [redacted] nothing else. [redacted] the ground [redacted]

"Indeed [redacted]

"I promise [redacted] father, and your [redacted] better defer it [redacted] Just now he is [redacted]

"Indeed he is, [redacted] have the cup of happi[redacted] I have borne—you [redacted] long years!—how I [redacted] endured! Ah, no, no, [redacted] known—may you never know!—what it is to be unhappy."

"But, good Alexis, remember that, at the beginning, there was no prospect of your marriage before the

lived on hope."

now. I promise you I will

intercede for you with my father in some gentler moment. Mind! I do not, for I cannot, promise to be successful."

"Nor will you be, it is my belief," ejaculated Alexis, struggling for self-mastery.

"But what I can do, I will."

"Dear, excellent sudarina!" And he gratefully kissed her hand.

"Yes," said Olga with emotion. "I shall hope to succeed. And if I do not, you know, Alexis, we are but where we were."

"No, that we can never be," interrupted Alexis. "Stephanie and I must henceforth regard ourselves as married in the sight of heaven—we can never, never be *as we were*—never with regard to yourself, sudarina, for we thought you harsh; henceforth we shall adore you: never as we were towards Ivan Petrovitch, for till I made suit to him, he never fully showed his black heart."

"Well, well, Alexis, I must not hear all this—go now, for we are busy; go, and live on hope."

"If I can, sudarina!"

And with a sigh and a smile, he withdrew.

This incident threw a gloom over the day. There was much to be done; and, till bedtime, Helen had not leisure to read a second time and with full enjoyment, a letter from England she had received at breakfast. The pleasure was a sorrowful one too; it brought all whom she loved so vividly before her,

and yet they were so far off. Nor were their prospects so smiling as to make her at ease concerning them. She mused long and sadly; then undressed; and, just before she went to her bed, looked out of the window. The sky, as usual, was lurid in one or two quarters, with distant fires. Nearer at hand, all was in dark shade; though she fancied she could dimly discern the dwornick moving to and fro, and hear him tuning up the balalaika, with which he occasionally kept himself awake by thrumming on it very feeble and harmless airs.

She had sought repose, and was just dropping asleep, when she was roused by a voice at no great distance beneath her, at first low and subdued, but gradually venturing on more strength, so mellow, sweet, and sorrowful, that its pathetic music rent the heart. Evidently it was not the dwornick, though on his beat; a friend, then, of his, or he would not have permitted the serenade to take place. The air was slow and plaintive, and the voice so excellent, the style so cultivated, that Helen, though she had heard much of the national genius for music, could not suppose the vocalist to be of the lower orders, but felt convinced the serenade must be intended for Olga, whose departure it deplored. Anxious to know whether Olga were awake and listening, she softly passed through the door which opened into her bed-chamber.

There lay Olga in rosy sleep; but she started from her light slumber as Helen bent over her, and hastily asked if it were time to arise.

"No," said Helen. "Hush! hark! there is the most lovely singing beneath the window."

Olga sprang out of bed, went towards the window and listened intently. After a short pause, the singer had resumed with still more fervour and passion. The words were distinctly articulated—"How can I live on hope?"

"'Tis Alexis," ejaculated Olga. "He does sing divinely, I know. They would have engaged him of my father for the Italian Opera if they could, but papa tried to make too hard a bargain for him. I wonder if Stephanie hears him; she sleeps in the adjoining closet, and he is under her window, not mine—shall I go in and see?"

"No, don't invade her privacy; it is the last time she will hear him."

"I must have one little peep. Yes, she is out of bed, and kneeling at the window," whispered Olga eagerly; "sobbing as if her heart would break. Poor Stephanie! Just hear him—there's a dying fall!—what a charming portamento. It really is heart-breaking;—but I am very sleepy, so good night."

"Good night." And Helen returned to her own room, to listen yet longer to the lamentation that subdued the very soul.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUMMER-TIME IN THE COUNTRY.

THE bedroom of M. Boris lay on the opposite side of the house, or it is probable the serenade would not have been attempted. In the morning, all were early astir; Helen and Olga were in good spirits, but M. Boris looked black as night. *Could* he have heard the singing? Helen thought not, and she was growing accustomed now to these fits of impenetrable gloom. As for Alexis, he looked so unlikely to "strike the light guitar," in the grave business of the morning, that Helen almost doubted if he could have been the musician, after all. He came and went, answering M. Boris's repeated summonses with a dogged mien, and returning monosyllabic replies to his dry, curt commands.

"The dog is dangerous," muttered M. Boris at length, as Alexis left the room; "he is ready to fly at his master's throat."

"Oh, no, papa," interposed Olga; "he is only sorry we are all going away: and a kind, cheerful word from you would make him smile."

A frown was her only answer; and she darted away to the house-door, to cry "Alexis! Alexis! be sure you water those flowers while we are away."

He smiled, but sadly; and said, "Yes, sudarina."

"And be sure you read all the books I have left out for you; for they are very amusing and interesting."

He smiled more gladly this time, and said, "Yes, sudarina."

"Well thought of, and well spoken, Olga," said Helen approvingly; "for he feels you have kindly endeavoured to cheer his loneliness."

A kiss was Olga's answer.

Everything was now ready, even to the samovar, and M. Boris's writing-desk under the carriage-seat. Soon they were rattling along the ill-paved streets, between rows of wooden houses with yellow-painted upper stories; then jolting through the long, mean suburbs, till they reached the high-road, which was still rougher than the streets. Petrouchka, the bearded coachman, now began to talk to his leash of horses, and make long speeches to them, as if they were reasonable creatures. At first, the unexpected jolts repeatedly threw Helen and Olga against one another; while their rattling over the stones prevented their speaking, except in raised voices. But Olga was not to be daunted: she was in a sociable mood.

"What do you expect our country-house to be like?" said she.

Just then they were passing a forlorn-looking two-storied house, about a furlong from the road, without hedge, wall, paling, or tree near it; the sun shining full on its uncurtained, unshaded windows.

"Something like that?" said Helen, interrogatively.

Olga looked roguish, and gave a little nod. Helen was rather dismayed. "Well, we must make the best of it," said she philosophically.

"Aye, nothing like philosophy," said Olga; "is there, papa?"

"I was not attending to what you were saying," said M. Boris.

"I said there is nothing like philosophy."

"Such a truism as that hardly requires an answer, I think," said M. Boris, recurring to his newspaper.

His unsociability did not prevent Helen and Olga from enjoying their journey. To Helen, especially, to whom everything was new, everything was interesting,—whether the hazels and birches in their early green, at long and remote intervals,—the rows of long, straggling log-huts, with their gables to the road, and thatched with musty straw, dignified by the name of villages,—the lone houses of landed proprietors, set on the ridges or against the sides of

low hills,—the staring white post-houses, with the double-headed eagle emblazoned over the doors, or the poor inns, with verandas and heavily-carved window-frames. At one of these, in a miserable town, they found a broken-down telega belonging to M. Boris, that had been sent forward with servants and luggage, being clumsily repaired for the rest of the journey. And here M. Boris, who for some time had laid aside his newspaper, and sat in gloomy silence, suddenly declared he must return at once to his office, as something of importance had been forgotten.

An old drosky was at hand, but some time was occupied in getting it ready; and in the meantime they all alighted, and entered the best parlour the house afforded. Olga reminded her father, that unless he dined here, he would probably go dinnerless, as nothing was prepared for him at home; but he said cabbage-soup or a sturgeon's head were likely to be the best dishes the house afforded, and that he would rather trust to old Marousha to provide him something. There was nothing to do, therefore, but to look at the idlers gathered round the britzka and telega, or examine the painted Easter eggs and trumpery china in the little corner-cupboard, till the drosky was ready; and Helen thought even the glare of the noonday sun preferable to the close and fetid air of the inn-parlour.

At length the drosky was ready; and M. Boris, having replaced Olga and Helen in his own carriage, promised to be with them at night, or, at latest, the following morning.

"It was unfortunate," said Helen, as they pursued their way, "that M. Boris should be obliged to return, and travel in that uncomfortable drosky."

"Oh," said Olga, "I believe it is nothing in the world but a pretence to see what Alexis is about. Papa is so dreadfully suspicious! I have known him to do so before. He first oppresses people, and then expects them to retaliate; which they often do, if they can. As for despising the inn-dinner, it was only because he thought the expense might be saved, and that you and I might as well be content with the cold chicken; for he despises neither cabbage-soup nor sturgeon, and will not care a straw if Marousha serves him her own dish of smoked sausage-meat with onions. I believe he would keep us all on such delicacies if he could—with perhaps the variation of a great joint of large, red, half-cooked pork on saints' days. But now, Helen, is not the country becoming rather—just a little—pretty?"

"Yes; spring makes everything pretty."

"Hark! there is a lark!"

"Is it?—Yes, I *see* that it is one; but its song is less gay than ours—it is like the music of your country. Look at that dirty woman driving the pigs

out of her cottage. They run straight across the moujik sleeping in the sun, and he never stirs! Surely, he might leave off his sheepskin coat in this warm weather! How short all the peasants are!"

"Oh, the tall ones are picked off for the army!"

"Indeed? Then I think Russian mothers must pray for short sons."

In the afternoon, the bow to which the outside horses are attached gave way, and they were obliged to stop to have it repaired. One or two moujiks came lazily out of some road-side cottages, to look on rather than help; and as Helen was desirous to see the inside of a peasant's dwelling, she thought this a good opportunity to enter one.

It was neither worse nor better than the rest, but a miserable place. The stove took up the greater part of it; and on this lay an old woman, peevishly muttering to herself, and apparently half imbecile. A boy sat on the ground in a corner, plaiting himself birchen-bark shoes, intently watched by two young children with bare feet. The walls were hung with wretched little images of saints, which seemed excellent fly-catchers, for they were covered with hundreds of insects. A middle-aged woman, thin and careworn, was clearing away the remains of the mid-day meal, from the top of an old chest that served for a table. The food consisted but of black bread and salted cucumbers, with a can of quass;

but the Russians are hospitable to a proverb—of their little, a little they'll give; and the peasant looked wistfully at her food, and then at the ladies, as if wishing, yet feeling ashamed, to invite them to partake of it; but a second look at Olga seemed to decide her on her line of conduct, and she put the untempting loaf away, without even making them welcome to her dwelling.

"Bread and salt," said Olga. But the customary "You are welcome to them," was unspoken.

"We are interrupting your meal, I fear," said Helen.

"We have fed," was the dry answer.

"Are these all your children?"

"All these are my children, but they are not all I have had; two are buried."

"Not lost, but gone before," said Helen.

The mother made no answer.

"You are an ingenious little fellow," said Helen, accosting the little shoemaker. "Will they last you long?"

"Oh, no! I shall wear them out in a day or two; but I can make plenty more—they don't take me long. We have a family pair of boots for the mud and snow, but father generally has them."

"And they are too large for you, perhaps?"

"Yes."

"Whose serfs are you?" said Olga.

"Not yours, Olga Ivanovna," said the mother rudely. "Not yours, thank Heaven!"

Olga looked surprised. "Why are you glad of it?" inquired she. "Have I ever done you any harm?"

"'Whoso hurts the goose, hurts the gosling,'" said the peasant. "And again, 'The earthen pot cannot contend with the brass pan.' And again, 'The lamb feels the knife, even though he bleats not.' Is it not so, good mother?"

"Aye, aye," cried the old woman, taking up the string of proverbs, "and a peaceable poor wife is better than a cruel barina. Love is better than riches. Smite not a moujik in the sun, lest in the dark the moujik smite thee. The cow has a long tongue, but she dares not speak."

"I cannot imagine how I have offended you," said Olga. "I do not think I ever saw you before."

"I have seen you, though, more than once," said the woman; "and moreover, my father is Nicolas the ikon-seller. Perhaps you don't know *him?*"

"Ah," cried Olga, with a quick, vivid blush, "what has become of the good old man? I can remember him ever since I was a little child."

"And you had him beaten almost to death?"

"I? No! *Was* he beaten?"

"*Was* he beaten? Ah, sudarina, surely you must have known—you might have laid your fingers in the stripes. And it was owing to you."

"Owing to me, but not done by my order, or with my knowledge," said Olga. "I simply knew he had disappeared, and have often wondered what had become of him."

"He won't cross your path again," said the woman. "It was owing to his carrying letters, or messages, for you, without your father's knowledge; and your father had him beaten, almost to death."

"I am sorry, very sorry," said Olga. "Accept this, though it will not cancel his beating. It is over now, and cannot be helped."

The woman softened and said, "I believe you are sorry—and this will buy bread for my children. Well, then, let us say no more. Kind words go farther than stripes."

"Who knows how oft the carpet was beaten?" cried the old woman. "He is a fool that refuses a salve for his wound. Though a broken head be a curse, an empty stomach makes it worse."

Michael here came to announce that the harness-bow was replaced; and as they left the cottage, the mother of the family said with a little compunction, the single word "*prosti*"—"forgive."

"I do. And forgive me also," said Olga, "if in aught I have offended."

"May God be your help!" said the woman.

"Salvation to thee," said Olga.

And the last farewell word was "*Svami Bogh*"—"Go with God!"

"Well," said Olga, laughing a little, as they drove off, "see what your desire for a domiciliary visit has cost me!"

"It has been a good lesson to you," said Helen, "and I think you must be glad to have had the opportunity of making some acknowledgment—I will not say reparation—of your injury."

"Oh, but you may say reparation. We Russians are not so fastidious as you English; and a serf of a higher class than these would think a handful of blows well paid for by a handful of kopecks."

As these two never seemed to tire of one another's company, the rest of the journey was very pleasant. About an hour before sunset, they turned off the high road towards what looked like a forest, with here and there a gleam of water. Flights of birds flew overhead, disturbed by the noise of wheels along the weedy road; gay wild-flowers grew among the long, tangled grass, and the air was fresh and pleasant. Presently they drove up a lime-tree avenue; and Michael alighted to open a rusty gate, which gave them the opportunity of hearing the barking of a number of fierce dogs.

"That's our welcome," said Olga. "We shall get no better; so we may as well welcome ourselves;

and I, at least, Helen, may welcome you to the home of my forefathers."

They were now at the door of a dilapidated old stone mansion, which, facing the north, and surrounded by untidy, neglected plantations, looked gloomy enough; but yet more than respectable—dignified.

Stephanie had already arrived, and awaited them among a group of servants in the hall. Olga led the way through a vestibule and ante-room to the drawing-room. It was more stately, but more shabby, than Helen had expected. An old yellow flock paper with tarnished gold moulding covered the damp walls; some large misty mirrors and portraits, by different and indifferent artists, hung round the room; the heavily-carved chairs and sofas, not of the cinque-cento school, were covered with faded and dirty yellow satin; there were no books, flowers, vases, or musical instruments to give any air of elegance.

"My pianoforte is in my own dressing-room," said Olga. "I will have it brought down to-morrow; but hitherto I have had no one in the house whom I cared to play to or please, except, indeed, Henri, when he came to shoot wild ducks. Well, Helen, what is your impression?"

"I have hardly had time to form one," said Helen. "Give me till to-morrow."

"Unfavourable, of course," said Olga, laughing. "Well, it cannot be helped. To me it never looked so cheerful as your presence makes it already. To-morrow we will set things in order. Meanwhile, I will show you your room, which is close to mine; so you need have no fears, even in this old rambling house, wherein the ghost of my great-grandfather is said to walk, robed in a long caftan, on windy, wintry nights. There is no need for us to dress for one another—we will have coffee, stroll up the lime-tree alley to the river, come home to eat strawberry ice, chat a little, read a little, and go to bed."

Helen found the premises included a long disused concert-room and theatre, but neither chapel nor library. Her own room was hung with a common striped paper, decorated with some poor prints and small pictures of saints; with an old-fashioned toilette-glass in a dark wooden frame carved in flourishes like curled leaves. It looked out on an orchard full of crooked apple, cherry, and plum-trees overgrown with moss, and well populated, apparently, by jackdaws, sparrows, and squirrels. A wooden wall divided the orchard from a kitchen-garden, full of cabbages, onions, carrots, and common pot-herbs; beyond which were corn-fields, and the thatched roofs of a few cottages.

Olga's room, which was only divided from Helen's by a dressing-room, had a different aspect, and a

prettier look-out, though there was something desolate in the accessories of a broken fountain, an overturned stone urn, a headless statue lying among the long grass, and a ruinous pavilion.

"This seems a place that has seen better days," said Helen pensively.

"How should it be otherwise?" said Olga. "My great-grandfather had, I have been told, four hundred household servants, including a complete band of musicians, a company of actors and actresses, besides scene-painters, house-painters, carpenters, joiners, cabinet-makers, upholsterers, glaziers, and every trade you can think of, all of them serfs, born on his own land. Besides these, there were coachmen, footmen, grooms without end, smiths, farriers, and coach-makers, and forty female servants, whose sole business was needlework and embroidery. At his death, each of his four sons took equal shares of his serfs; of course my grandfather had only a hundred of the household, ten of whom were embroidresses. But though a man greatly beloved, he became poor; every one fleeced him. My father, I am afraid, ruined him, and brought sorrow on the old man's grey hairs. That was before I was born. As soon as my father found himself the sole representative of the house, he became sobered; and, going from one extreme to the other, grew excessively parsimonious. You know what he is now,

when people say he has made much money—he has not the heart to spend it. So we live in the corner of our great old house, like sand-shrimps in an empty crab-shell. But come, let us go down to the river before the sun sets. Throw your veil over your head; you will find it quite enough."

They strolled down the wood-path to the water-side, enjoying the refreshing coolness. Various small animals, alarmed at their light tread, ran among the brushwood, and birds rustled and fluttered over their heads. They reached the brink of a small but deep river, which, Olga told Helen, contained mullet and other good fish. It seemed the spot for a hermit to dream out his days. Flocks of wild ducks were gliding on the surface of the waters, and a couple of herons balancing themselves on a little promontory of the opposite bank. A young man seated under some trees, was engaged in fishing; close to the spot on which Helen and Olga stood, a little boy, stretched all along on the ground, was intently reading. Olga suddenly laid her hand on his shoulder, and made him give a great start. He turned round his open, honest face, and looked up to her with great blue, wondering eyes.

"Ah, barina!" exclaimed he gladly, "I did not know you were here."

"Sudarina is grand enough for me, Fedor," said Olga. "Why, who taught you to read?"

"The widow Apollonia."

"Ah, the widow Apollonia! the dear good woman! We must go and see her, Helen, to-morrow. And what book has she given you, Fedor?"

He silently held it towards her.

"A translation from the English into modern Russ," said Olga, examining it. "Look, Helen!"

"One of Legh Richmond's tracts—'The Young Cottager!'" exclaimed Helen. "How very singular to meet with it here!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A LORD OF THE SOIL.

THE young man who had been fishing now approached, with an undecided, sheepish air. His dress, though not below that of many a Russian country gentleman, was so ill-chosen and slovenly, that Helen guessed him to be many degrees beneath the rank that really was his. He wore an olive-coloured frock coat, far from new, with brass buttons, leather gaiters, and a violet satin cravat, a good deal frayed; his mien was ungainly and slouching, his countenance not bad, but totally destitute of intelligence. As he slowly drew near, he seemed deeply occupied in pulling a pair of coarse gloves over a pair of coarse hands, as if for the sole purpose of immediately pulling one of them off again, to present his hand, all glorious with gaudy rings, to Olga. The want of connexion between his sentences, which he rarely finished, had the appearance of proceeding from embarrassment, but was in reality a habit that had become natural to him from the confusion of his ideas. Helen had yet to

learn how ruinous, mouldy, and dilapidated a landed proprietor can become, who dwells wholly and solely among his serfs.

"I did not know," said he awkwardly, "that you were here—that is—I supposed.—To be sure Gour told me—only I thought it was not to be till next week,—that is, a day or two—"

"As Gour had very little to do with our arrangements," said Olga, whose *nonchalance* amusingly contrasted with his embarrassment, "it did not signify if he were not quite clear about them. You need make no apology, Paul Adamovitch, for fishing in our grounds. You know you have my father's free permission to do so."

"And I've just caught a beautiful mullet," continued Paul, eyeing Helen at every other word, "which I shall do myself the honour—the pleasure, I mean, of carrying up to the house—"

"Thank you: pray do not trouble yourself; here is little Fedor will run up with it."

"Ah, that will be still better—That is—Of course, I should be most happy." And Paul hid his blushing face among the long grass, in which he affected to be seeking for the mullet, though it was close at hand all the while.

"Here, boy!" cried he, with a decision and command that showed how he could speak to a serf, even though not belonging to himself. Fedor readily

took the fish, tucked his little book under his arm, gave Olga another bright look, and trotted off to the house.

"It's easy to see how good you are," said Paul, gazing on Olga with a mildness in his round blue eyes that was almost silly. "That boy, now,—quite adores you! And so must every one, I should think—every one, that is, that—who—"

"Thank you; don't qualify it," said Olga. "I believe little Fedor is fond of me, seeing he owes to me many toys, cakes, and games of play. And now let me present you in form, M. Paul Adamovitch Miloff, to my friend, Mademoiselle May."

"Ah,—French, I suppose," said Paul Miloff, raising his hat half a yard above his head, and holding it there for a minute, while his good white teeth were displayed in a smile that extended nearly from ear to ear.

"No; English," said Olga.

"Better and better," said Miloff. "That is—every one thinks—"

"Oh, no, every one does not think," said Olga, quietly, as if he had made a general observation.

"And how is M. Boris? Dear me, I ought to have asked that before; only—That is, I may as well walk up to the house, and ask him myself."

"Your attention is needless, as my father has not yet joined us."

"Oh,—then I'll walk up to the house for the pleasure of seeing *you*."

Olga looked as if she were inclined to remind him he was doing that already; but, as she afterwards told Helen, she thought he deserved to be rewarded for finishing one of his sentences. "Really, coming from *him*, it was quite epigrammatic."

"And where are you sojourning in this neighbourhood?" said Olga, as they slowly returned up the alley.

"Oh, at my aunt's, as usual," said Paul. "That is—Ah yes, by the by, I recollect I did once stay at M. Stepanoff's—Oh yes,—ah, to be sure! and another time, you know, with Serafin Gudonoff—Only that time was before the—Well!" in an altered key, and very abruptly, to little Fedor, as he came running back from the house. "Take my basket and rod, boy,—you know where I left them,—up to Apollonia Mikhailovna's; and mind you don't hurt any of the tackle. At *once*, do you hear?—or I'll ... set you to rights!"

Arrived at the door-steps, M. Miloff seemed quite inclined to go in and spend the evening; but Olga, with an adroitness that did not seem exerted for the first time, told him so unmistakeably that her journey had tired her, and she required repose, that he was obliged to understand her, and content himself with saying that he would give his aunt the honour and

pleasure of knowing of her arrival, and would wait on her, to inquire after her health, the next day.

"If I have my usual good luck," said Olga, after he was gone, "I shall so time our visit to his aunt, as that he shall call here when we are out, and we shall call there when *he* is."

Olga did have her usual good luck; for, the following morning, just as she and Helen were driving out of the gate, they caught a glimpse of him in the far distance, approaching by another road, enveloped in a cloud of dust.

"Now," said Olga, as they drew near their destination, "we shall be sure to find our good widow engaged with all her heart and soul on some hobby of the moment—killing the snails on her garden wall-fruit, collecting rose-leaves for a *pot-pourri*, measuring English calico for her maids to sew, or preserving strawberries; but the best of it is, that she never minds setting aside her own hobby to concentrate her whole interest in that of her neighbour. And don't mind, Helen, if she attacks me about something or other; for she always means it kindly: and, to tell you the truth, she never hurts me much."

The loud barking of dogs now proclaimed their arrival at the gate of a white wooden house, of moderate dimensions, and quaint but comfortable aspect, with green painted shutters, and backed by a few linden-trees. An old man presently hurried

through the little court-yard, with an armful of cabbages, into the house, through a side door, where they could see him slipping on an old livery-coat, and sleeking down his grey locks with his hands. In another minute he was at the front-door, and opening the gate with a smile of welcome.

Olga spoke to him kindly, which seemed much to gratify him; and after showing her into the little low drawing-room, he could not help lingering to chat with her a few minutes, and tell her how badly he and his mistress had had the rheumatism during the winter, before he summoned the latter from the garden.

Some flies for fishing, in the process of making, on a small table beside a chair with a yellow-and-white striped cotton cover, betokened the nephew's whereabouts when he was at home; and an easier chair in an old-fashioned flounced covering of white dimity, with a half-finished cabbage-net near it, indicated the seat of his aunt. There were a great many little curiosities about the room, ranged with considerable neatness, though without any fruitless attempts at their matching; of which it might be said they were of a kind likely to be chiefly valuable to their owner, who had probably some pleasant or affecting associations with every one of them: and these gave an air of habitation and comfort to the room, that made it far more attractive to Helen than the great saloon of

M. Boris. Shells, dried flowers, wax fruit, stuffed birds, a live squirrel and parrot, golden fish gleaming in the sun as they darted round their crystal globe—books, and pieces of china, stuck up on various little corner shelves—very handsome and comparatively new writing implements—old prints, framed, glazed, or pinned or pasted against the wall,—all these, though smiled at by Olga, had a kind of interest for Helen, who fancied something affectionate and amiable about the owner.

The peculiar look of a book on the table near her induced her to take it up. To her great surprise, it was the Indian Journal of Dr. Claudius Buchanan, translated into modern Russ. She had just laid it down, with an expression of wonder to Olga, when the widow Apollonia entered, and running briskly up to her young neighbour, embraced her, and kissed her on each cheek three times.

She might be a little turned of fifty, but her skin was as smooth and soft as satin, and tinted like a peach: it was no infliction to kiss her smiling cherry lips, disclosing small, pearl-white teeth. She bore a strong resemblance to her nephew; but her blue eyes were mild without being stupid, and her nose was less of a pug. Her dress was a small fresh white satin bonnet, made on a pasteboard foundation, probably by herself; a chintz gown, rather washed out, and pinned round her, so

as to reveal a white cambric-muslin petticoat, snowy thread stockings, and prunella shoes—not slippers—with substantial soles, and coming up well over the instep; a pea-green China crape shawl over her shoulders.

"I am so glad to see you!" cried she with animation, taking one step backwards to survey Olga with attention and completeness, and then rapidly giving her six more kisses. "Paul brought me word you had arrived in the country; but little Fedor forestalled him, the rogue, for which he got a box on the ear."

"Poor boy!" said Olga.

"Oh, but Paul was so disappointed," said his aunt, "though I chid him for it too. But I could not do so severely, because I know that everything relating to you concerns him so much. Well, and you, too," turning to Helen, "you are the English lady. Yes, yes, Paul told me so, the countrywoman of the humane Howard, and of Legh Richmond, who wrote the pretty little books;—yes, and of the good Dr. Pinkerton, who came among us to distribute the Holy Scriptures among our poor people. Lives he still?—Oh, I hope he does! You see, I know all about you; yes, and about your good little Queen—I hope we are not going to war with her. We have had our female sovereigns too—famous ones they were; but not good—no, no—

great, but not good. My dear Olga Ivanovna, do you ever read a little history now? I know you were not fond of it; but you should, my child—not for show, but to be a resource against the evening of life. Then, when beauty is fled, you will feel the advantage of a well-informed mind. If it be but five pages a-day—that is what I say to Paul—set yourself a regular task, if it be but five pages. I make him do it, too—that is, when I can; but sometimes he says, 'Oh, aunt, I must finish this fly,' or 'Oh, aunt, I must go fishing;' and now and then I hear him snore. At dinner, I ask him to give an account of what he has read: I go back as far as Rurik, and I say, What can you tell me about Rurik? I cannot say he can tell much. He says, 'Oh, aunt, I have passed Rurik long ago—I can't remember so far back; I am now in the false Demetrius.' Ha! ha! ha! Never mind; he'll be the better for it in time, because, mark you, he now knows there was once a Rurik; which at first he did not. Yes, yes; we shall get on in time; he will become interested when he reaches Peter the Great. I generally set him to read in the evening, because I found his mornings were always taken up; and then I gave him his book after dinner, while I took a little nap. But whenever I awoke, I saw him just closing his book, and putting his pocket-handkerchief over his head, with the strawberry-dish empty, and a great

heap of strawberry-stalks on his plate. He would then say, 'I am going to think over what I have read,' and gently draw his handkerchief down over his face. Ah, I knew what would come of that!—you may both guess, that presently I heard him snore!"

"But I am thankful and proud to tell you," said Olga, "that I neither snore over my book, nor run away from it. Do I, Helen?"

"No," said Helen; "you have become rather fond of reading, provided the book be not too dry."

"Such as this, for example," said the good Apollonia, taking up Dr. Buchanan; "this is not dry—no, not at all; and it would do you good. It was translated, when I was a girl, by our good Princess Sophia Mestchersky. Ah, she was, indeed, one in a thousand! She aided your good Dr. Pinkerton," turning to Helen, "in forming a Bible Society in Moscow; she visited the St. Petersburg prisons, and expounded the Scriptures to the poor prisoners, like your good Mrs. Fry; she visited also the hospitals and poor-houses; she translated various works by your Hannah More, your Legh Richmond, your Buchanan—what say I? She circulated four hundred thousand copies of different useful productions, composed or translated by herself—among the poor, mind you—being in modern Russ, and at her own expense; for, with the assistance of the good Dr.

Pinkerton, she printed, bound, and published them herself, at an expense of ten thousand roubles. Oh, she was a good woman, a self-denying woman! insomuch that Alexander Paulovitch, our good Emperor, privately joined her in the work, and contributed to it twelve thousand roubles; because, he said, it was for the benefit of his poor ignorant subjects. What think you, Olga; was it not a noble deed?"

"Certainly, I think so," said Olga.

"I should like to hear you say so more heartily, however," rejoined Apollonia; "because, mind you, you yourself will some of these days be the mistress of great wealth, and it is only the possessors of great wealth who can do good on this large scale; and too often they want the heart to do it. But ask yourself, Olga Ivanovna, how much pleasure, in comparison, would the Princess Sophia Mestchersky have had, think you, had she spent her ten thousand roubles, not on the souls of the poor, but at *rouge-et-noir*, or in a diamond as large as a walnut? My dear, she would have made no provision whatever for the evening of life: whereas, a woman who employs her wealth in beneficence, and her time in cultivating her talents, may grow as old and ugly as she pleases with impunity; for who asks what the author of a pretty book is like? or who cares whether an old or young organist plays behind the green curtain?"

At this point, Paul Miloff entered, looking ex-

tremely warm with his ride, and dressed with great attention to appearances, even if with little success.

"How unfortunate I was," said he, approaching Olga with his broad smile, "not to find you at home —that is, I am fortunate in finding you here; so that there's no difference, I think."

"Except the annoyance of your ride on a hot day," said Olga. "That makes a difference, I am afraid."

"Oh, no, not to see *you!*—that is, to be sure, I might have seen you here, and more of you too, if I had not gone out—and if you had just mentioned, yesterday, that you meant to call this morning on my aunt."

At this moment old Peoter, the man-servant, entered with a large old-fashioned silver salver, on which were little liqueur-glasses, a liqueur-case, and a very elegant silver chased basket, filled to overflowing with a tempting variety of rout-cakes, macaroons, bon-bons, and slices of rich iced plum-cake.

Apollonia hospitably handed the basket to her young friends herself, and desired her nephew to help them to noyau; for though it went against her conscience to induce young people to take liqueurs, she could not refrain from making them welcome to the best of whatever she had. So it was of no use to say no, because the more they declined, the more she pressed; and Paul Miloff, to vie with his aunt i

liberality, though the noyau was none of his, filled the glasses so full that it was impossible to raise them without letting the contents run over; and then bade old Peoter, with his shaking hands, to present them to the ladies, and not to spill the noyau, or he would shave his head for him.

This nearly overset Helen's gravity, and Olga was obliged to inform her that, though M. Miloff did not seriously mean to do anything so shocking, a threat of shaving the head was tantamount to one of sending a man to serve in the army.

Old Peoter went off, shaking the venerable poll in question in a very marked manner; and Helen contented herself with hoping that, as she and Olga had merely touched the noyau with their lips, old Peoter would privately have the reversion of it, which might be some compensation for the affront to his respectable pate.

Meanwhile, Paul Miloff, considering himself at once as host and guest, continued to offer the cake-basket to Olga and Helen again and again, in spite of their having already declined taking any more; and each time availed himself of the opportunity of helping himself to the largest piece left; so that the elegant cakes, which had certainly not been provided for him, instead of being heaped in rich profusion nearly to the glittering handle, shrunk down below the brim of the basket; and once, when Olga

accosted him, his mouth was so full of almonds and sugar, that he nearly choked in attempting to answer her.

Olga concluded her visit by inviting him to come and partake of his beautiful mullet with M. Boris and themselves at six o'clock; an invitation which he immediately accepted, and which appeared no less gratifying to his aunt.

CHAPTER XV.

COUNTRY NEIGHBOURS.

"WHAT do you think of my old friend?" said Olga to Helen, as they drove off.

"I like her," said Helen. "She is homely, but kindly. I think she gave you little reason to accuse her of severity."

"That shows how much I must be improved," said Olga laughing. "Indeed, I know I am. You may think me far enough off, still, from what I ought to be; but I know I am more promising, at any rate, than I was."

They had yet several country neighbours to visit. The next was a widow-lady in narrow circumstances, with two grown-up daughters, who were neither intelligent nor well-informed. They lived all the year round in the country, and envied those who could spend the winter in St. Petersburg, Moscow, or even a second-class provincial town. They were discontented with their lot, and seemed incapable of mending it. Helen was not surprised that Olga

did not like these people: she pitied them, but did not think their companionship could be beneficial or improving.

Next, they paid a state visit to a grand Countess, who was said to dabble in politics, and who was surrounded by a cluster of admirers and satellites. She was too self-important a personage to have much attention to bestow on a young person like Olga, who was chilled by her reception, and soon took leave.

Next, they called on some very French ladies fresh from Petersburg, who were dressed in the height of the fashion and could only talk of the fashionable world. Other visitors were present; and a young lady dressed in mourning, who appeared to be staying in the house, after one or two gestures of surprise and emotion in the background, came forward, and taking Olga caressingly by the hand, exclaimed, "Dear Olga, how long is this estrangement to last? It makes me profoundly miserable —I declare to you, since this coolness arose, I have never known peace. Cast all the blame of it on me if you will, only say you forgive me."

"I have no blame to cast on you that I know of, Sophia," said Olga, looking much embarrassed. "For whom are you in mourning?"

"Is it possible you did not know that Frederick Vassilivitch had lost his father? As a near relative,

of course we put on complimentary mourning; but between ourselves, dearest Olga, the old man's death is not much to be regretted, for Frederick is now in a position free from all pecuniary difficulties."

She looked searchingly, as she spoke, at Olga, who changed colour as soon as she heard his name; but she did not seem to have a word to say when Sophia ceased. After an awkward pause, she, with some effort replied,—

"Then I hope he will pay his debts."

"His debts? Of course—that is, if he have any," said Sophia, who seemed to think it a very odd question to raise. "Are you not concerned for the poor fellow?"

"I am sorry he has lost his father, certainly," said Olga, with constraint; "that is, if he be sorry himself. And if he is not, he is the more to be pitied, and condemned; for I believe his father was a very good old man."

"How changed you are!" said Sophia reproachfully. "Do come to the window." And winding her arm round the reluctant Olga's waist, she drew her out of Helen's hearing, and talked to her at the window with much display of earnestness. Olga seemed in great perplexity and discomfort: at length she broke up the conference by saying, "Well, I must go now, or papa will be kept waiting."

"Will you not let me come to you, then?" said Sophia, whiningly.

"I must not; you know papa has insisted on our intimacy being broken off."

"Ah, Olga, you are so cold!" and Sophia applied the corner of her handkerchief to her eyes.

But Olga was firm, and hastened to take leave of the lady of the house, and of all the friends round her whom she knew. Helen afterwards counted up forty-eight kisses that had been exchanged on the occasion.

"You surprised me by your firmness," said she to Olga, when they were once more together.

"I rather surprised myself," said Olga, between laughing and crying. "I had no idea, till we met, how my sentiments towards her had changed. *You* have to answer for it, Helen."

"I hope I may never have anything heavier to answer for," said Helen. "To me she so clearly seems not only artificial, but designing, that I think her an unsafe companion for you."

"What designs can she have?" said Olga.

"In the first place, she designs to make you think her very devotedly attached to you, which, I really believe, is not the case."

"Well, I have my doubts about it, too," said Olga, "though, once, you could not have hurt me more than by saying so. What can have made me

so sharp-sighted? I suppose, living with so truthful and honest a person as yourself. Knowing what the real thing is, I have learnt to detect the counterfeit."

"It may be so," said Helen. "But very young persons are apt to be deceived by any who think it worth their while."

"Or worth their *wile*," said Olga. "There! I have made an English pun."

"Especially if they flatter," pursued Helen.

"Which she certainly did, sometimes," said Olga; "and I am afraid I liked it. I had nothing better to like, *then*."

"What do you like better now?" inquired Helen.

"Common sense, plain dealing, and sincere affection—you, dear Helen," said Olga, kissing her.

"Number forty-nine," said Helen, laughing.

"Why, you cross, cold, captious creature, would you have one live without kissing at all? Ah, there is the old troïka driving away from the door. And there is Mr. Howard standing on the steps! Well, papa has soon picked up a visitor! Tell me, Helen, how old do you think he is?"

"M. Boris?"

"No, no! Mr. Howard."

"Oh, perhaps thirty-two, or thirty-three."

"He cannot be less than thirty-three, I think. That's rather old, Helen?"

"For what?" said Helen.

"For whom? you mean," said Olga.

"What!" cried Helen, "is he to be the successor to Frederick Vassilivitch?"

"No, you stupid Helen! Of course, I was thinking of *you!*"

"Thank you," said Helen, laughing; "but I have no views of the kind you seem to allude to; nor, I think, has he."

"He is certainly not very handsome," said Olga, ruminating. "And yet he has a pleasant, cheerful face—a good countenance, as people say—a sensible head, good forehead, quick eye, and pleasant smile. Is he above or below the average of your countrymen?"

"You may take him as a pretty fair average specimen. Pray, is M. Miloff an average specimen of yours?"

"Well, there you have the advantage of me. Certainly, at our table to-day, the English will bear the palm. You and Mr. Howard against Paul Miloff and papa—"

"Why not, against Paul Miloff and you?" said Helen. "That would be more polite and more dutiful, I think."

"Certainly," said Olga. "But here is Mr. Howard, waiting to receive us. Well, Mr. Howard, welcome, cordially welcome to Vogdolitch! The surprise is equal to the pleasure."

"I concluded you would be surprised," said he, laughing, and offering his hand to assist her from the carriage; "but M. Boris was so pressing, there was no refusing him; and I thought it would be so nice to come down here and get on with my book!"

"Oh, if that is all, it is paying us a very poor compliment," said Olga.

"Well, but the town was so dull without you; there was no bearing it, even for twenty-four hours." And he hummed—

"'What's the dull town to me?
Robin's not here.'

"For Robin read Olga; or Helen, whichever you like."

"Helen, certainly," said Olga. "But this is very perverse of you, Mr. Howard. Did I not press you, as much as a lady could, to come here, the very evening before we started?"

"But M. Boris did not—"

"Hem! that is true. You remind me what a very young lady I am. And what has now made papa more gracious?"

"Why, I took his part yesterday in rather an awkward affair. Going to the public office, I heard high words proceeding from your father's bureau. Surprised to hear his voice, I looked in, and found a young fellow in a furious rage, ready to collar him.

Of course that would not do; I came to the rescue, and took the youngster by the nape of the neck. The rascal proved to be one of your precious serfs, who had taken advantage of your father's absence to open his desk with a false key."

"Alexis?" exclaimed Helen and Olga in dismay.

"The very fellow. So, of course, there was nothing for it but the police-station—"

"Oh!—Papa *did* not have him flogged?" cried Olga piteously.

"You both seem very much moved, ladies. The young villain is, I believe, not worth your pity.—No, he was not actually flogged, though within an inch of it; because I, who wanted to see how matters of this sort are conducted, (for my book, you know,) went along with him; and made out by the way, that it was not a case of circumstantial, but only of presumptive evidence. This, of course, made all the difference; so I took the responsibility on myself of staying the policeman's hand, while I returned to M. Boris to find if it were the case; and, if so, to intercede for a mitigation of sentence. Your father had, it seemed to me, been a little too hasty,—he suspected that the impression of his private key had been taken in wax, and that, during his short absence, the lock of his desk had been tampered with, and papers within it examined, though not removed. It had very likely been done, it is just

like you Russians, (saving the ladies!) but there was no proof of it whatever, Therefore I, as an Englishman and a lover of fair play, begged Alexis off; and he came in for only a reprimand. I half repented of doing so, too, the next minute; for the young rascal would by no means beg pardon and promise 'never to do so any more,'—but turned dead sulky, as I think Russians can do more to the purpose than any others; and when he was sent about his business, he muttered something that sounded very much to the effect—'you have taught me what I can do, and it shall go hard but I better your teaching.' Thereupon, I shook my fist at him and growled; M. Boris fell upon my neck, kissed me three times on each cheek, treated me to dinner at a restaurant;—we had a capital fish-soup, roast veal so-so, bad wine, good coffee and cigars. M. Boris expressed the friendliest emotions, invited me hither, offered me a seat in his carriage, and—bah!—here I am!"

"I must go and welcome papa," said Olga, "and then dress for dinner, after appointing you one of our sixteen spare bedrooms."

"Sixteen? You told me six-and-twenty!"

"No, no, I never did!"

"I've booked them six-and-twenty in my journal—I must diminish them, that's flat. Ladies, *au revoir.*"

When Olga and Helen returned to the drawing-

room, they found M. Miloff already arrived, in his best dress-suit, and Mr. Howard giving him an amused investigation as a natural curiosity. M. Boris was talking to the young Russian about fishing and field-sports.

"This young fellow," said Mr. Howard aside to Helen, "has been occupying half an hour or more in trying to drown a lame duck. He has shot it for us, and the duck has tumbled into the rushes; and there it sticks, for he can't carry on his story any farther."

During the whole of dinner, Mr. Howard took a mischievous pleasure in drawing him out, which he did with such success that Helen was glad of any pretext to smile, and Olga laughed continually and openly. M. Boris snorted from time to time: it was difficult to know whether he attended to the by-play or not.

"Well, and so you killed him dead at last?" said Mr. Howard. "And then, I suppose, the next thing was to have the duck cooked?"

"Yes, that is—I—" (here Paul Adamovitch gave Michael a smart rap on the head, for knocking his bread off the table) "how do you like it?"

"Rich, very rich!" said Mr. Howard, with a side glance that almost put Olga into fits.

"Well, ducks always *are* rich, certainly," said Paul; "I hadn't thought of that.—Bless my heart!"

For Michael, of malice prepense this time, had tripped and spilt the hot sauce down the nape of Paul's neck, wofully greasing his dress. Of course he was sent off in disgrace, with the promise of a shaved head; but it was with what Mr. Howard called 'a gloomy joy,' at having had his revenge.

All sorts of condolences from Olga, and offers of assistance, clean cravats, &c., from M. Boris and Mr. Howard, of course took place; but the young man, having rubbed his poll well with a fine damask napkin, sillily said, "he should do very well as he was; that was, if the ladies didn't mind."

Olga assured him she did not mind, and the remainder of the meal was undistinguished by any misfortunes.

The whole party returned to the drawing-room, still in the glare of the summer-sun, though tempered with blinds and light draperies. There was music under the windows.

"Oh, see!" exclaimed Helen, "there are peasants dancing on the lawn!"

"I knew they would," said Olga, "and was expecting your surprise. I heard the tinkling of balalaikas before we came in."

"This is to welcome you, I suppose?" said Mr. Howard.

"Yes; but they often do it while the summer lasts."

"Very pretty! — very sentimental! We have nothing to come up to this in England, Miss May."

"No," said Helen.

"Bah!—All the better."

"The costumes are prettier than we see in England," said Helen. "The full white chemisette, with blue ribbons, the tight-fitting crimson sarofan, with its gold lace and buttons, the long braids of fair hair down the back, and the gold-embroidered shoes, are very picturesque."

"All for effect!"

"But the effect is good. So is that of the men's red shirts, confined round their waists with silver bands; and the men themselves are pleasant-looking, though stunted. Ah, there is my little maid, stealing in among the dancers: a cheerful-looking young peasant is offering her his hand. How shyly she looks up at us!"

"This is what I call very delightful!" said Paul Adamovitch, stretching himself on one of the old satin sofas, and looking out on the lawn—"pastoral without, and polish within. A very pretty girl is now dancing. Ha! her partner is the rascal that spilt the hot gravy down my back! He wants a taste of the knout, that fellow!"

CHAPTER XVI.

LA VILLEGGIATURA.

"HELEN," said Olga, the next morning, at breakfast, which, thanks to English influence, was not taken apart, and in slovenly dèshabille, "were you not amused at Paul Adamovitch's 'polish within'?"

"Certainly," said Helen.

"I shall make what artists call a finished sketch of that young noble," said Mr. Howard. "I take him to be not an exceptional case, but a specimen of a class; and shall therefore cultivate his society, and make a thorough study of him."

"I am afraid your book will be dreadfully satirical, Mr. Howard."

"Well, there will be some quiet irony in it, no doubt. There are things that one must either storm or laugh at; and I prefer doing the latter."

"Would it not be better," said Helen, "since poor M. Miloff will never have the opportunity of profiting by your printed sarcasms, to avail yourself of your intended intimacy with him to incite him to self-improvement, rather than show him up in your book?"

"I might do both—that is, if there were any capability in him of being incited; which, I fear, there is not. But I have no objection to try; on the contrary, I am rather fond of saying to people, 'You had better have done this—you ought not to have done that.'"

"I believe there are plenty of others who are fond of it," said Olga. "Pray tell me candidly, do our musical performances distract your attention when you are writing?"

"Not at all; on the contrary, I am very fond of hearing Miss May's white fingers sweetly tickling the harp, and yours coming down with prodigious power in a grand chord on the piano."

Mr. Howard said no more than the truth—the sound of music made the gloomy old house more cheerful; and he could set down the chain of his ideas quite connectedly while duets were being played in the room below. Sometimes he leant back in his chair for a few minutes of luxurious rest, after by no means too laborious occupation; and thought, with great satisfaction, how comfortable it was to be studying the natives under the roof of a silent host, with a lively daughter and her sensible friend. Often he would proceed to dwell on their respective characters, and give himself a little credit for keeping well with so difficult a person as M. Boris—an arduous matter occasionally, certainly, but well worth undertaking

for the sake of dependent advantages. He found the best way was to see as little of his host as he could; which was easily managed, as M. Boris wrote much in his study, and took solitary walks of inspection about his estate. Mr. Howard contrived to write at least as much in his own room as M. Boris in his study, and to keep in it either till he could join Helen and Olga, call on Paul Adamovitch, or take a solitary stroll by himself.

His personal observations on the serfs and their dwellings were by no means favourable. Some of the younger peasants, as Helen had said, were cheerful and honest-looking; but the greater number were stunted, careworn, and grown old before their time, without industry or energy, and dwelling in tumble-down huts, with doors hanging loose on their hinges, open to every pig that chose to walk in, mistaking his proper dwelling. Now and then Mr. Howard fell in with an itinerant scythe-seller, or a collector of old rags, and chatted with him on country matters; getting a good deal of curious miscellaneous information, as long as it did not affect the man's own interest. Many of the proverbs in every poor person's mouth struck him as having a good deal of fidelity and submission in them; such as, 'A good slave is willing to die for his master;' 'Pride for the boyar, common sense for the serf;' 'The moujik has but one thing to mind—how to get

his work done.' But still they were only employed as generals, never sincerely used with respect to M. Boris. Indeed, when Mr. Howard saw how he sold them their spare time at the highest possible price, how he suffered their homesteads to fall to ruin, how severely he punished even the theft of a stick, and how seldom he responded, even by a nod, to the timid salutations of his people, there seemed nothing surprising in their giving him, among themselves, the nickname of the *bireouk*—that is, the silent, morose man.

Olga, on the contrary, was popular everywhere, and more so this summer than she had ever been before; for Helen had incited her to a sort of house-to-house visitation; and as these domiciliary visits were kindly and pleasantly made, and generally followed by the remedy of some domestic want or nuisance, the women became ready to kiss the hem of her garment. Helen was sorry to find that her former maid, Fedosia, had not returned to her father's cottage any the better for her abode in an unruly, ill-managed establishment, and had finally disappeared from the neighbourhood in company with a travelling merchant.

Sometimes, after the intense heat of the day, Mr. Howard would stroll out with Helen and Olga to the river-side, or through the wood-paths to the village. Here they often found a couple of villagers

dancing, while a man, with his back against a tree, played the bagpipe; and a few lookers-on sat on logs, or stood around. Sometimes, a merry fellow seated in the middle of a plank balanced on a tub, afforded a see-saw to a couple of light-hearted girls, whose pretty laughter and little screams of sham fright were enjoyed by him in perfect quiet. At other times, a prettier domestic scene might be witnessed at the door of Vacia,* a favourite serf of Olga's—favourite because he was always pleasant-spoken, and his cottage always clean. It stood in a little thicket apart from the rest, and though only built of logs, they were squared with the hatchet and whitewashed; a sort of Swiss staircase led to a little ballustraded gallery running round the outside of the upper floor, and shaded by the projecting roof; and the telega and sledge in the yard were tidily drawn up out of the way. Indoors, the table and benches were as white as scrubbing could make them; the walls were decorated with gaily-coloured little pictures of saints; and a lamp burned before an image in the corner.

In front of this neat little dwelling the honest Vacia might be found on summer evenings, sitting on an inverted tub in the shade, giving his little boy Pavel a ride on his toe, while Fedor, a few years older, pursued his study of "The Young Cottager"

* Synonymous with "Jack."

under a tree, or hunted in the wood for wild strawberries, of which he often brought Olga a little offering. Meanwhile, Anna, the comely wife of Vacia, was usually looking on, not far off, with her youngest child in her arms, chatting with her husband on the affairs of the day, and often making him laugh at some piece of homely wit, or family joke that never grew stale. Anna had had a fourth child, that was carried off while in infancy, *she* thought by the *roussalka*, or wood-fairy; her wiser neighbours surmised by a wolf.

This humble family, if tinctured with superstition, were unaffectedly devout. Vacia was punctual at church on Sundays and saints'-days, and never started on his morning's work without crossing himself and imploring the Divine protection. Anna had formerly been slave to the widow Apollonia, who had taught her many good things, and who, on finding her warmly attached to the good and steady Vacia, had, out of the tenderness of her heart, prevailed on M. Boris to buy her in exchange for a less valuable serf, and permit the marriage to take place. Therefore Paul Adamovitch, in knocking Fedor occasionally on the head, might think he was only keeping a boy in order who ought to have belonged to his aunt.

When Olga visited Anna, she would freely partake of her bread and delicious honey, made by the

thousands of bees that hummed among the linden-flowers. Sometimes she would read to her a little; at other times, catechise Fedor, or borrow one of his pretty birchen-baskets and go with him to hunt for mushrooms. Helen would sit netting or embroidering under the aspens; or perhaps Mr. Howard would tempt them both into the boat, with Fedor at the helm; and after a great deal of splashing and crab-catching, get them into the middle of the river and there rest upon his oars, telling them droll stories without end; to which Fedor, with wide-open eyes, would listen as attentively as any of the rest, though he could not understand a word. Mr. Howard was a very careless boatman, but what did it signify? Often he ran them aground, or got among the long leaves and interwoven stalks of the water-lilies, rousing flocks of noisy wild ducks, justly offended at this intrusion into their dominions. Sometimes they would remain on the water till quite dark; as dark, at least, as a Russian summer night ever is, when the still air was full of sweet odours, the shadows fell broad and dark, and no sound was audible save now and then the plunge of a large fish, or some mysterious cry, that Fedor, shuddering, said was made by the wood spirit. At other times, Olga would tempt Mr. Howard to swing her in one of the large, commodious swings that still stood in the pleasure-grounds, and make the air ring with her

girlish laughter as she cried, "Higher! higher!" Mr. Howard evidently liked the amusement as well as Olga. Helen often asked herself whether his growing attachment to Vógdolitch betokened any incipient affection for its young mistress, or whether Olga's openly expressed partiality could ripen into any deeper feeling; and the question began to make Helen grave.

But the Russian summer was growing hotter and hotter—intolerably hot; there was no night to be called night; and M. Boris took advantage of it to exact field-labour by night of the poor serfs who slept through the heat of the day. The reaping quickly followed the hay-making; but it was impossible to carry on either beneath the burning rays of the noontide sun; and even when the sleepers awoke, and languidly resumed their rakes or their sickles, it was soon to lay them aside, while they slaked their thirst at the nearest brook.

Helen and Olga now spent little time in the house, but sat under the trees, listening while Mr. Howard read Shakspeare, or Walter Scott. Frequently he and Helen had long discussions, to which Olga silently listened with deep attention; and as Helen was certain Olga was thus imbibing a world of good, she encouraged and led to these conversations as much as Mr. Howard would let her. And he was a willing confederate; for, instead of writing, he had

become fonder of lying all along in the shade, attired in grey nankeen, with a straw hat over his eyes, his arms under his head, and his tongue ready to discourse on any theme, grave or gay, religious, moral, artistic, or literary, that his companions chose to start.

"Are you a peripatetic philosopher?" he said to Helen one day, when Olga was chasing a butterfly.

"Why do you ask?" said Helen.

"You are Olga Ivanovna's instructress, are you not? But all your teaching is by the wayside—I see no school routine, no parade of governessing; you scatter your seed hither and thither, leaving time to prove whether it takes root and brings forth fruit, or is dried up and withered."

"Is not that the best way?"

"With a pupil like yours, undoubtedly. I give you infinite credit for it."

"The fact is, I did not know what kind of charge I was undertaking, nor did M. Boris seem to find me the kind of governess he had intended to engage; and as it suited all parties better that I should remain here than that I should return home, and as there was too little difference of age between Olga and me for her to be disposed to submit to any formal exercise of authority, I made the best of things, and taught her what I could, and when she would. I hardly know what I shall make of her."

"Make her like yourself, sweet Miss May."

Helen looked grave.

"I am quite in earnest," persisted Mr. Howard. "She is so enthralled by you, that you may make her what you please."

"She is very fond of me, certainly; and I feel it gives me a great deal of power over her. Indeed, I think she *is* growing a little like me, already."

"Do you? Ho! ho! ho!"

"It may sound conceited, perhaps—"

"Conceited? Ho! ho!—ho! ho! ho! ho!"

"Well, Mr. Howard, you know infants often learn their nurses' peculiar looks and ways; and Olga is but a child of larger growth. But the resemblance I spoke of is that of tastes, feelings, habits, and—yes, I will say—principles, more than any other. She has learnt to find a retired life may be full of pleasant resources; she has acquired a real relish for many good English authors—not only Thomson and Cowper, Addison and Johnson, but Hannah More's best prose works, and the Bible itself."

"How you get along with her religion is the most curious of all. She has read my D'Aubigné with avidity."

"Because the way had been paved for it by Robertson's Charles the Fifth. I found her profoundly ignorant of the history of the Reformation, and told her so."

"I wonder how you got some of your books into Russia. On the principle of the old adage, I suppose—'Some may steal a horse,' &c. Well, but the Bible? A little love of forbidden fruit helped you there, I fancy?"

"At any rate, I did not force it on her: she asked me to let her read it. I made a great favour of it, and proposed our reading it together."

"Beginning with the New Testament, of course?"

"Certainly not! How is that to be understood without reading the Old Testament first? We began Genesis, reading through one subject, one character, or portion, at a time: the creation, for instance, for one reading; the flood, another; Abraham, another; Jacob, another; Joseph, another."

"I see!"

"She found this excessively interesting—so did I: we used to be quite glad, sometimes, when M. Boris came home later than usual. Then, you know, we got to Pharaoh and Egypt, which was very interesting ground. I wanted her first to get a comprehensive view of Jewish history, and its bearing on Christianity. She became profoundly interested in David—we went through the Psalms at the same time, of course noticing the types. When we got to Solomon, we read the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes."

"Go on, Miss May."

"All this while, you know, she was going to church every saint's day with Madame Birschoff; crossing herself, prostrating herself before different shrines."

"So she does now."

"But in a different spirit. Her religion, when I began with her, was so completely nominal, that it left the door open for me. Now, I am sometimes ready to tremble at the possible effect of the light breaking in upon her;—yet, how can I hold back? what can I do?"

"Go on telling me about your readings."

"Then, you know, we came to the Prophets. When we began Isaiah, it was necessary to read the Gospels at the same time. Thenceforward, the New Testament became our chief reading, and we only read the prophecies in connexion with it. We are now in St. John. Olga's remarks are often excessively original and interesting. Sometimes she says, 'Another window is opened on me!'"

"What would her old 'religion-master' say?"

"Luckily, we have left him behind us."

"What will M. Boris say?"

"I doubt if he will say anything. He never gave me the smallest direction on the subject—laid no restrictions on me—asked no promises: it was *I* who, before I left England, stipulated that I should not be expected to attend the Greek church."

Mr. Howard fell into profound thought. His eyes glowed with some internal interest, but its nature did not appear.

"Here comes our charming butterfly slayer," said he suddenly. "Well, since you have crushed the poor thing, I will sing its dirge."

And he began,—

"Poor insect! born to flutter and to die;"—

falling into the second, directly Helen took the first, till he got down to such unreasonable bass that he suddenly gave a shriek in alt that made Olga stop her ears.

All at once, the sky became darkened by clouds; a sudden summer storm was impending; the wind rose, large drops of rain fell, and increased to a torrent: before they could reach the house the thunder broke with a crackling sound over their heads, and the lightning seemed to tear up the ground immediately before their feet.

Olga, wet and panting, burst into gay laughter as she reached the house and shook the rain-drops from her hair; but Helen, who was rather overcome, sought her own room, and felt awed and subdued by the sudden hurricane.

"The Jews call thunder 'the voice of the Lord,'" thought she. "How grand, how terrible it is!"

And she repeated to herself "The voice of the

Lord is mighty in operation; the voice of the Lord is a glorious voice. It breaketh the cedars: even the mighty cedars of Libanus. The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire; the voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness; yea, even the wilderness of Cades."

From a child, she had had an instinctive dread of thunder and lightning, which might have acquired an unreasonable ascendency, had not her mother talked quietly to her about it, and taught her a reassuring hymn, which even now recurred to her—

"How fearfully the tempest roars!
The rain in rattling torrents pours,
My trembling soul that Power adores
Who bade this tempest rise.
The wind and storm fulfil His word,
In them His glorious voice is heard,
By Him the electric fires are stirred,—
Ruler of earth and skies.

"Oh, 'tis a glorious, blessed thing,
For which to praise thee, O my King,
That I, a helpless worm, can cling,
With confidence, to Thee.
That I, by faith, amidst the storm,
Can hear Thy voice, can view Thy form,
Nay, feel Thy sheltering pinions warm
Extended over me!"

Amid the clapping-to of doors and outer shutters reverberating along the numerous galleries and passages, Helen fancied she heard the peculiar tones of Alexis's voice in some of the distant offices.

Afterwards, meeting Stephanie in the corridor, the bright but suppressed smile on her lips and the light in her eye made Helen conclude Alexis must really have unexpectedly arrived; and she asked her.

"Alexis? Oh dear, no, mademoiselle," said Stephanie, immediately growing very demure. "A courier from Moscow has indeed arrived with despatches for M. Boris, but a *very* different looking person, I assure you—quite a common man!"

And with a little jerk of the chin that spoke of offended dignity, Stephanie passed on.

On Helen rejoining the family, she found the courier's despatches had occasioned no small disturbance. M. Boris had been summoned to Moscow on official business, of no pleasant complexion, it would seem, from the portentous cloud on his brow. Dinner had been hastened, and Mr. Howard, who was glad to improve his acquaintance with Moscow, readily agreed to accompany his host, when that gentleman, in an ungracious kind of way, said, "I suppose you don't want to go?"

M. Boris seemed quite brightened by the idea of having him for his companion. "This will be very pleasant—very pleasant," repeated he, as he gulped down his fish-soup; "I don't expect to be there more than a day or two, but it is lonely to be shut up by one's self at an inn."

Soon they were off, and Olga observed to Helen how strange it was that Mr. Howard should seem to have so won upon her father, whom she had never seen to like any person so much before. Helen, without knowing why, felt melancholy. Olga participated in her sadness, influenced by an uncomfortable misgiving as to the nature of her father's summons to Moscow, though his habitual taciturnity excluded her from any knowledge of his affairs.

"Suppose he should have displeased Government," said she, "and that, whether rightfully or not, there should be some charge for him to answer. Such things occur every day; and as false witnesses are easily suborned, especially if the accused is rich, he may be sent to Siberia at a moment's notice, and we may never see him more!"

As Helen believed such instances not uncommon, the idea did not make her more cheerful; and Olga looked very grave.

"Helen," said she at length, "if you were me, what should you do in such a case?"

"What case?"

"If my father were sent to Siberia?"

"Really, I do not know."

"I think I should send for Henri."

"Well, I think that would be as good a plan as any; unless your uncle—"

"Henri's father is not my real uncle, you know;

only my aunt's second husband. He does not know nearly so much of our affairs as Henri does."

"Then I should think Henri would be the proper person."

"Yes."

After another long pause,—"I am so glad Mr. Howard is with him. He will do what he can, out of good nature and for my sake; and the very name of an Englishman is some sort of protection, as yet. Only, if he found my father had done anything very bad, he would not stand by him; and how could we expect it? Oh dear, I don't like the idea of Siberia!"

And suddenly bursting into tears, she flung her arms round Helen, and wept on her bosom; and Helen wept bitterly too.

CHAPTER XVII.

TROUBLE.

THE storm seemed to have made the air closer instead of clearing it. The great, gloomy old house seemed more dismal than ever; and, at night, Olga felt so lonely and dejected, that she begged Helen to let her sleep with her.

Instead of sleeping, she lay awake a long time, telling Helen dismal stories. The servants, she said, firmly believed, that when the house was left locked up for the winter it was taken possession of by her great-grandfather's ghost. They also believed in a domestic spirit, a kind of Lob-lie-by-the-fire, called the Domovoi, whom poor over-tired servants sometimes heard moving about them and doing their work. They also believed that the ghost of Olga's mother walked; and Olga had many mournful stories to relate of this lady. At length they both slept. At dead of night, Helen was roused from an uneasy dream. She could hear the rain-water not only trickling through the leaden pipes, but bubbling up between the window and window-sill, and

thence dropping down on the floor. The storm, however, had now passed, the air was cooler, and the moon was fitfully shining out between masses of clouds.

Helen could not sleep; being very sensitive to atmospheric influences, the electricity in the air powerfully excited her nerves, and made them thrill at the most trifling sound; while the deathlike stillness of night, undisturbed at length even by the trickling drops, became almost more irritating. "In a highly rarified atmosphere, the faintest vibration is heard." In this highly rarified atmosphere, then, Helen fancied she heard the remote sounds of Alexis's voice, singing in the open air; and as she had just been dreaming of him sending M. Boris to Siberia with a look of malicious satisfaction, the supposition of his being at hand did not seem so absurd as it would have done in broad daylight, especially as she had fancied she heard his voice in the afternoon.

As his being about the house, if he really were so, was certainly without sanction, Helen sat up in bed, to listen more attentively. All was silent: she lay down; again she heard the distant voice. This time, she continued to hear it when she sat up; and being exceedingly feverish and nervous, she resolved to fathom the mystery if she could; and, without disturbing Olga, she softly rose, slipped on her

dressing-gown and slippers, and stole along the corridor to a spare bedroom at the farthest end of it, which communicated with the wing occupied by the *babas*, or maid-servants.

Helen entered this bedroom. The ghostly light was streaming in through the tall, narrow window; the waving branch of a tree across which made her step backwards in affright, for at first she thought some one was trying to get through the window. She approached it and listened; all was still: she looked out; all was shadow. She was going away, when she thought she heard voices softly talking, and a little laugh. She strained her face against the window, but could see nothing; she softly opened it, but not so softly as not to be heard; and just as she looked out, she saw a shadow steal round the angle of the house.

There was nothing more to be done, so she returned to her room, none the wiser or more comfortable for having left it. Olga started up in wild dismay.

"Mamma!—Who's there?—Have they taken him?" cried she.

"Taken whom, dear Olga?"

"Oh Helen! is it you?" (with a deep sigh.) "Papa to Siberia!"

"Oh, no; nothing of the sort. Lie down, dear; there is no alarm."

"Then, why are you out of bed?" looking round,

as if she still expected to see a spirit not quite melted into air.

"I fancied I heard Alexis about the house."

"Alexis! He is in town."

"We think him to be so; but I fancied I heard his voice yesterday. And just now, when I woke, I seemed to hear him singing."

"Oh, dear Helen, you must have been dreaming! Do come to bed."

And Olga again slept.

In the morning, the bright sunshine, unaccompanied by fierceness, streamed through the green window-blinds; the flowers seemed laughing in their beds, the larks were singing, the grass looked greener, and even the moss-grown urns and fountain, and the ruinous old see-saws and swings, looked less ghostly and forlorn than usual. Light vapours, drawn up by the slanting beams, reminded Helen of passages in Milton and Keble; the sound of the scythe fell pleasantly on the ear; flocks of white pigeons wheeled rapidly overhead; and still higher, the lark was singing a psalm of rejoicing beneath a sky of cloudless blue.

"Where now are your fancies about Alexis?" said Olga gaily, as she threw open the window.

"Where now are your fancies about Siberia?" retorted Helen. "They came with the storm, and with the storm they have departed. Are we late?"

"No, very early. Don't let us ring for our maids, but do without them for once—I shall enjoy it, for a frolic; and, as soon as I am dressed, I will run over to the bath-house."

Olga's movements were quick as light; her toilette was soon made, and gaily triumphing over Helen for her more leisurely proceedings, she left the room and tripped down one of the many flights of backstairs. At the foot, in the doorway, equally to her surprise and his, she ran against Alexis. They both turned white as death, and then red. He stood transfixed.

"Alexis!" exclaimed she, as soon as she could gain her breath; "what do you here?"

"I have but—just arrived," he stammered.

"No," said Olga with spirit; "you have not just arrived, for your voice was heard yesterday, and also in the night."

He turned deadly pale. "Pardon, sudarina!"

"You have done very wrong."

"I came with—letters."

"Where, then, are they?"

He had none. He fell at her feet.

Olga had stepped into a little waiting-room at the foot of the stairs. She now sat down.

"Shut the door, Alexis," said she.

He obeyed; and stood like a penitent.

"Alexis, I promised to speak for you to my father—"

"But you have not," said he reproachfully.

"That is more than you know. I told you I should await a good time. You should have been satisfied. I had not forgotten you."

"Doubtless," murmured Alexis submissively.

"In the meanwhile, your conduct has made you very undeserving of such kindness. You took advantage of my father's absence from the office—"

"I didn't!" cried Alexis, fiercely.

"Hush, Alexis!—you have not heard what I was going to say. At any rate, you are taking advantage of his absence *now*."

"And has not he driven me to it?" cried Alexis, still more violently. "He treated me like a hound! he sent me to the police-station! he threatened to shave my head! Was I going to stand this—I, who had done him no wrong—I, who was his right hand, and who had received the education of a gentleman?"

"From *whom?*"

"From him; for his own selfish purposes, and to make me feel indignities more keenly."

"Alexis, you know—you *know* you are wrong. You must go back directly."

"I *was* going back!" said he, very passionately.

"You had no business to come. I do not know what my father will say. You must go back directly."

"Oh, yes; he will—he will," said Stephanie, who had for some time been listening at the door, and who now stole in, bathed in tears. "But do not tell of him, sudarina! Indeed, indeed, he is very sorry, and will never do so again. Keep his secret, and we will ever bless you!"

And she threw herself at Olga's feet. Alexis stood, hardening his neck.

"Well, if you will really promise faithfully—" said the relenting Olga.

"I will," said Alexis, at her feet in a moment.

"Then I will not, of my own accord, mention this to papa, nor unless he speaks of it first: for you know, Alexis, how very angry he would be."

"I think I do, sudarina."

"He would be almost ready to flog you."

"He *would* flog me. Thank you!—thank you, kindest sudarina! I go hence this moment. In ten minutes I shall be off the estate."

And, kissing her hand, he was gone; Stephanie after him. Olga returned, much fluttered, to Helen.

"You look as if your bath had not agreed with you," said Helen, closing her little Bible.

"I have not bathed, nor shall I now. Oh, Helen, I have been so worried!"

And she told her all.

"And now," said Olga, sighing, "I shall go to my own room, and make a better toilette at my

leisure; and if Stephanie gives my hair an extra pull or two, I shall know it is for my having got up an hour too early; and perhaps I should do the same to her, if we were in each other's case."

Towards evening, a troïka drove briskly to the door, and M. Boris and Mr. Howard threw themselves from it in towering wrath—one for himself, the other for his companion. M. Boris had been sent on a fool's errand: he was not expected or wanted at the Government office; and as the handwriting of the missive was unknown to all, and the courier had disappeared, the author of the mischief could not be traced. Helen and Olga exchanged uneasy looks, but said nothing; and Olga, who had been seriously alarmed about Siberia, embraced her father with affection, and said, "Really, papa, I am very glad to have you safe home again!"

He was touched, and put his arm round her, and rested his head against her shoulder for a few minutes. Then he began to talk about investigations and inquiries.

"Upon my honour, sir," said Mr. Howard, "I should recommend you to take no more trouble about the matter. We have had a very hot and unpleasant journey, as it is; and if you get vexing yourself about it much, you may throw yourself into a fever, than which nothing would be more agreeable to your enemy, whoever he is."

"Oh, I've plenty of enemies," said M. Boris, in rather a satisfied tone than otherwise. And as Mr. Howard was glad to see him disposed to yield the point, and Helen and Olga were thankful that no suspicion seemed to turn towards Alexis, they were all satisfied together, and sat down to a good dinner, which the gentlemen seemed to think some compensation for their reverses.

Helen was astonished that a nature so suspicious as that of M. Boris should not at once have made him attribute the hoax to Alexis. She forgot that she was behind the scenes, that the misdemeanour had not actually been fixed on him, and that the unknown courier and his missive bore every appearance of having really come from Moscow.

M. Boris was very liberal this day of his champagne, which he did not often drink himself, nor offer very freely to others. He told Helen he thought she must have taken the temperance pledge; and Olga, that she was a good girl, and should keep up her spirits.

"As they were in glee and in merry ma-*king*," it cannot be said that, "A cat and her kittens came tumbling in," but another troïka drove up to the house, containing Henri; and as he seemed to have brought a valet and some luggage, it was clear he came to stay.

Olga ordered some of the dishes to be brought

back, and a dinner spread for him on a side-table.

Henri was in the room the next moment, kissing all round; even Miss May, though *he* knew that *she* knew that *he* knew it was not the custom of her country. She took it with composure, while he looked as grave as a judge, having reached Mr. Howard, whom he did *not* kiss.

Henri had never seen him before, and looked at him rather sharply. Mr. Howard stood the scrutiny with perfect indifference; and M. Boris named them to one another. Henri bowed gracefully, but rather haughtily; and, turning to Olga, cleared his brow directly, and began to give her his step-mother's love, and sundry kind messages.

This went on till he sat down to his dinner:—and as he seemed inclined to talk rather than eat, Olga sentenced him to silence for ten minutes, while he paid due respect to ham and chicken; and diverted attention from him with the avowed object of his dining in peace. They were soon all chatting as cheerfully as before; and as the champagne had certainly warmed M. Boris's heart, and loosened his tongue in a remarkable manner, he became so very lively with Mr. Howard, that Henri, who had never heard his uncle make a joke before, and was pricking up his ears to catch every word that passed, was quite astonished. He knew not that M. Boris had

just been relieved from a state of intense anxiety, throughout which he had found Mr. Howard the greatest support, and that he consequently felt towards him a degree of gratitude which his rugged nature was seldom capable of entertaining or expressing.

Before dinner was over, Henri was actually jealous of this new comer, this jolly Englishman, who seemed equally at home with Olga, with Miss May, and with the hitherto intractable M. Boris, saying the easiest, sauciest things with the greatest ease, treated by the servants as if he were the son of the house, finding fault with or praising national customs and personal characteristics, cutting up the neighbours by name, and, in short, doing everything with the most perfect *sangfroid*. Henri did not know whether to feel quite affronted at him, or to consider him a capital fellow—he would suspend judgment; but at any rate he would not let him monopolise everybody as he was doing just now. For "everybody" read "Olga;" Mr. Howard was paying her some most extravagant compliments, looking as if he were in deep earnest, and the next moment laughing at her to her face for believing them. Olga said she had not believed them; and then there was badinage and a great deal of the light sort of touch-and-go repartee that passes very well for wit in general society. Henri looked at Helen; he thought

she looked pained. But no! The next minute, she was joining them, as heartily as either: only Helen never went too far; her wit was always characterised by truth and soberness. And Olga's was within bounds, too; girlish, innocent, unconstrained;—it was only that unabashed Englishman.

Well, but really he seemed a clever fellow, too; that was a clever remark of his on the wealth of nations—Henri would book it. Calling England at the time of the first French revolution the Thermopylæ of the universe, was good—so good, that the man must have honour and honesty to say it was borrowed. He might have appropriated it without any chance of detection, for who, in Russia, ever heard of Robert Hall? Miss May, to be sure—ah, of course; but yet Henri would do him the justice to think he was honest—Englishmen generally were so. Rough, bluff, but sincere and candid. This was evidently "a veritable John Bull."

So Henri decided to consider him a specimen of a class, and make the best of him accordingly. Soon they were all in the drawing-room, sipping coffee; and Mr. Howard challenged Helen to sing "We be merry elves of fairy-land." His singing, in Henri's opinion, was execrable; and he gladly gave up attending to it, to listen to his uncle's account of the summons to Moscow, which appeared to him a very mysterious and unpleasant affair.

When it was sufficiently discussed, Henri looked about him and found Olga drawn into the toils of "the illustrious stranger," and talking with Mr. Howard and Helen of Shakspeare's fairies, sylphs, and witches, asking pertinent questions about national superstitions, comparing them with those of her own country, its leechie, its domovoi, its roussalka, &c.,* analysing their comparative beauty or terror, wondering why Russia had not produced a Shakspeare, combating Mr. Howard's assertion that he could only have been what he was in a land of the free, appealing to Helen whether Shakspeare must not have been Shakspeare anywhere, and finally, with a sigh, pronouncing a graceful tribute to liberty.

"Can this be Olga?" thought Henri, in amazement. "How changed! how improved! Ah, if she were charming before, with all her follies, all her faults, what must she be now?"

He was sinking into a reverie, when Olga, skimming over the keys, said, "Come, Henri, come and give Mr. Howard a little better singing than his own!"

"If I can, certainly!" said Henri, instantly rising.

* The roussalka is a mischievous wood-fairy, with hair as green as grass, who lures people to harm, calling them by their names. The leechie is dumb, gigantic, with skin like the bark of a tree, and keeps winking at you through the trees, smiting its hands together.

"If you can, indeed! Now, Mr. Howard, you are going to hear a little really good music; so pray attend, with a view to self-improvement. What shall we begin with, Henri?"

"You have made me quite shamefaced," said Henri; "I don't know that I can sing at all."

"Oh, nonsense! Come! *'Vivi tu!'*"

And in another instant his balmy, penetrating voice was besieging the admiring ears of Mr. Howard and the tender heart of Helen, till the former told the latter he felt "quite subdued."

"Though I can't do anything like that," added he, in an undertone, "I can appreciate it in another. It comes natural, I believe, to these young Russians. I doubt if all that warbling and caterwarbling would be suitable to a plain Englishman—however, go on, M. Brunoff! Don't leave off, don't leave off! I could hear you all night!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

JEALOUSY.

"HOW do you like country life in Russia?" said Henri to Helen the next morning.

"Oh—quite as much as I expected."

"What an unsatisfactory, uncomfortable sort of answer! Who is to know how much or how little you expected? Do you miss anything?"

"Yes, I miss the daisy, the blue-bell, the scented violet, the hawthorn, and the honeysuckle."

"Humph! We have, however, the lily of the valley, dog-rose, linden-flower, and pretty blue flax —won't those do as well?—abundance of strawberries, raspberries, and currants, all wild, whereas you must cultivate them. See how our summer bursts on us all at once!"

"But I prefer its gradual advance; and our country-life is more cheerful than yours."

"What! with our dances and songs all the evenings? our out-of-door life?"

"Your dances on the grass we have not; but our

songs are merrier, less plaintive; our labourers are not obliged to sleep for hours during the intolerable heat of the day, and make up for it by working far into the night."

"But our summer nights are almost like day—only a sort of twilight."

"A day without a sun. I must confess I prefer a night that has a little darkness."

"'Total eclipse? no sun, no moon?'" returned Henri, smiling.

"Repeat him our beautiful sonnet, 'Mysterious Night,' Miss May," said Mr. Howard impatiently.

Helen, faltering a little, repeated—

"Mysterious Night! when our first parent knew
Thee from report divine, and heard thy name,
Did he not tremble for this goodly frame,
This glorious canopy of light and blue?
Yet, 'neath a curtain of translucent dew,
Bathed in the rays of the great setting flame,
Hesperus with the host of heaven came,
And all creation widened in man's view!
Who could have thought such darkness lay concealed
Within thy beams, O Sun! or who could find
(Whilst fly, and leaf, and insect stood revealed)
That to such countless orbs Thou mad'st us blind?
—Why do we, then, shun *death* with anxious strife?
If Light can thus deceive, why may not Life?"

"Your poets can't come up to that," said Mr. Howard, rather impolitely.

Henri was silent; then said, "Let me hear it again, please."

Helen complied.

Henri then said, "Very beautiful, certainly. Our general ancestor, however, had not long to know night only by report. And you will remember, Miss May, he knew it in these latitudes. You were speaking of our summer nights as if they lasted all the year round, instead of only three months."

"I forgot that," said Helen ingenuously.

"What a thing to forget!" cried Mr. Howard. Then, as if he had deserted the cause of his countrywoman, he attacked Henri again, with "You have no poets like ours—no Shakspeare, Chaucer, Spenser, nor Milton."

"We can appreciate your Shakspeare, however," said Henri with temper.

"No one but an Englishman can," persisted Mr. Howard. "It is something, however, to reverence him, which I admit you do. We can reverence what we can't understand."

"Much obliged!" said Henri, bowing with mock politeness.

"Painting again," pursued Mr. Howard; "you've no good painters. None to come up to ours. The arts require a free soil—they fade and wither in a land of slavery."

"Well, I cannot say I much admire your English school," said Henri, "and in music we beat you hollow."

[redacted]

And Mr. Howard walked off with his tin case and umbrella. Unconsciously, he was helping forward Olga's education; he had already made her not only very fond of collecting wild-flowers, but had given her a very tolerable insight into botany, so that she could pretty correctly make out the orders and classes of most of the specimens within her reach. Whatever she did voluntarily, she did ardently. Henri was struck at first, when, with girlish complacence,

"She ran her female exercises o'er;"

then became a little jealous of her assiduity in collecting for Mr. Howard, gumming specimens into his hortus-siccus and her own, and writing the name, order, and class, under each, in her most careful and distinct hand. Olga's writing, like her mind, had run wild before Helen undertook its training; now she not only wrote much more neatly, but, in her general habits and appearance, cultivated neatness. Henri saw the improvement, but saw it with a little bitterness; he attributed it too much to a desire to appear to advantage in the eyes of Mr. Howard. Henri knew Howard to be an ancient and noble English name; he doubted not Mr. Howard's being quite Olga's equal in point of descent; he appeared to be in affluent circumstances; his person, Henri thought, was decidedly prepossessing; his eyes, teeth, and voice (in speaking), good; his dress and bearing

thoroughly gentlemanlike, and even aristocratic. Still Henri, however jealous of his power over a young, facile girl, would not have dreamed of his obtaining the slightest footing in the good graces of his uncle; but, strange to say, he had made his way even with M. Boris! He could say things, do things, with impunity, that Henri would never have ventured on. This was too bad! Henri began to feel very savage; and his holiday at Vogdolitch, if more interesting, was less agreeable than he had expected.

Sometimes he thought the gentle Helen disapproved of Olga's open enjoyment of Mr. Howard's society, though she did not interfere: at other times he thought Helen was captivated too! Henri began to feel isolated: he reckoned up his grievances.

Grievance the first:—Mr. Howard, who wrote a fine, free, though not always legible hand, took up one day the Russian airs Henry had written out for Helen; and, bursting into a fit of laughter, said, "Who wrote this miserable little niggle-naggle?"

Grievance the second:—Mr. Howard, who could sketch well and boldly in pencil, had a weakness for colouring. He wished to embellish his journal with a series of coloured costumes; and, after making dreadful work with gamboge, indigo, lake, and Indian red, would call Miss May or Olga to his aid, pop the paint-brush into their hands, make them take his seat, and then stand behind it, eagerly watching their

amendments, with his face so very, very near theirs, that Henri would have felt it a privilege to take him by the collar, and lead him to the door.

Grievance the third :—Olga, to do her justice, was very kind and affectionate to himself; but just like a cousin, and nothing more. If he looked at her, she looked at him again, "like the poor cat i' th' adage." No downcast looks, no mantling blush—nothing sentimental, in short.

Affairs were brought to a crisis by Paul Adamovitch. One morning M. Boris put into Olga's hands a letter he had received from Paul, and desired her to read it. The letter was a proposal of marriage, so extremely well expressed, that Olga was certified it must have been drawn up by his good aunt. The caligraphy was miserable. M. Boris watched her with attention, but without anxiety. "Well?" said he.

"Well, papa?" said Olga, returning him the letter.

"What answer shall I give?"

"I am much obliged to you, papa, for asking me such a question. I hope there need be no hesitation on your part, any more than on mine, to answer it in the negative."

"No," said M. Boris, after a pause. "You see the amount of his capitation-tax. He has not nearly so many serfs as I had supposed. If it had been Constantine Petrovitch—"

Olga felt thankful it was not.

"—But as it is only Paul Adamovitch, I think you may do better."

"Thank you, papa!—I think so too," said Olga; and, kissing his hand, she hastened away to tell Helen, and congratulate herself on her escape.

M. Boris's dry, brief answer was written, and sent off. The next morning Olga received a note from the widow Apollonia, entreating her, in the most earnest manner, to call upon her without delay.

"This is rather awkward," said Olga. "She wishes me to go to her without you; and as Paul Adamovitch will probably take care to be at home, he will be falling on his knees to me, or some such absurdity. I think I must decline."

At breakfast, however, Mr. Howard casually said he should call on young Miloff, who had proposed shooting ortolans with him, and make some arrangement. Olga, therefore, afterwards told Helen that, if she would go with her, she would call on Apollonia, who would be sure to attack her the first time she saw her, and meanwhile besiege her with notes.

To the good widow's, therefore, they went, as soon as Mr. Howard had been allowed a fair start. Apollonia soon came running in to them, and reduplicated the usual number of kisses. "Ah, I knew you would come!" said she, taking Olga's hand, and making her sit close beside her—"I knew that kind heart!"

—caressingly tapping her on the cheek. "Oh, we have been in such a state here, you have no idea—Paul ringing for hot water!—Well, and so that stern father of yours won't let you two young people be happy? But he must!—but he must!"

"But, my dear, kind Apollonia," interrupted Olga, "you do papa injustice; for I can assure you he very kindly showed me Paul Adamovitch's letter."

"Ah, poor Paul!—your father had better not have done that. You are clever and instructed, and no doubt were disgusted at the poor fellow's style.—Say, was it a very pretty letter?"

"Very prettily composed, though not very prettily spelt."

"Ah, foolish fellow, he should have shown it to me!—'Let me see it before it goes, Paul Adamovitch,' said I.—'Why so, aunt?' said he. 'Is it the custom to show letters of this sort to one's aunts before they are sent?'—So, as I could not say it was, 'Let me alone,' says he, 'and it will be done well enough, if I can but get a good pen, and a piece of sugar-candy in my mouth.'—So he locked himself up, and copied the letter out quite to his mind; but, you see, that went for nothing, because of course he did not know his spelling was not good; so that it is a pity your father showed his letter, which he had better have read aloud to you, since you say it was well expressed. Dear me! dear me! what could he

have omitted?—the amount of his capitation-tax, the number of his serfs—"

"All that was put in."

"Perhaps, then, it was *too* business-like. But, surely, he said, 'your charming daughter'—'your lovely daughter'?"

"No, indeed, Apollonia, he said nothing of the sort. He said 'your daughter,' and that was all."

"Oh, oh!—shocking!—shameful! No wonder you were hurt!"

"No, indeed, I liked the sentence much better as it was."

"Ah, you say so, to save appearances. But, I'm confident—You haven't the letter about you?—"

"No, indeed," said Olga, laughing.

"But, my dear, I can vouch for its being in the rough-draft—Stay, I have it by me—"

And, in her anxiety to show that Paul knew something about manners, his aunt, plunging into her capacious pockets, pulled out a crumpled paper, put on her spectacles, and began very eagerly to read; saying, "This is the first rough-draft."

"Oh, this is really going too far," cried Olga with irrepressible mirth. "My dearest Apollonia, if Paul had written me twenty thousand letters in the finest text hand, full of 'lovely' and 'charming,' it would be to no good."

"Well," resumed Apollonia, "I grant you that it

is always best to plead one's own cause by word of mouth, and so I told him. 'Paper,' said I, 'is cold and dry, and only appeals to the reason. What is written on paper may be brooded over by the reader, and twisted into a thousand constructions the writer never intended. Whereas, the human voice, full of pathos and passion, is a fine instrument, equal to any tune you can want to play upon it, whether persuasive or convincing; and, besides, you can back it up by a melting look, submissive posture, clasped hands, and many other gestures.' 'Oh, aunt,' says he, 'you can talk like a book, and if you had to do all that, you could accomplish it, I dare say; but somehow, when I go into the presence of any nice young lady, I never can finish my sentences.' Well, Olga, we must grant that he cannot; but, after all, is that an insuperable objection?"

"Oh, yes," said Olga, shaking her head drolly, "an insuperable objection."

"Could not it be got over?" said Apollonia, coaxingly.

"It could not be got over," said Olga, inflexibly.

"Why will not *you*," said Apollonia, appealing to Helen, "speak a word for my poor boy? I dare say it would be of some good."

"Oh, no," said Olga, still shaking her head, "it will not be of *any* good."

"*Won't* you?" persisted Apollonia. Helen,

with dimpling smiles, assured her she thought it would be of no use.

"Well, it's a great pity," said Apollonia, heaving a deep sigh, which seemed to roll off a good deal of her trouble. "You see, I had made it out so nicely that they would do very well together; for, if she has the most sense, he has the most love, which helps to equal things. I had bethought me how they would embellish my evening of life with their mutual affections and reciprocal endearments."

Here Olga went into an agony of laughter.

"But I see it is not to be," pursued Apollonia good-humouredly, "so I may as well give it up, without letting it make any difference between us; for there is no reason why we should not continue good friends."

"Oh no, none whatever," said Olga.

"You would have steadied him so nicely, and made him so fond of home," said Apollonia regretfully.

"Why, he *is* very steady already, is not he?" said Olga, opening her eyes.

"Oh, yes; only—as to being fond of home, he's fonder of your house than of mine, or his own; and though it is not very enlivening for him to stay with an old aunt, I'm always afraid of his going home for long together, for fear of his marrying one of the maids."

Olga smiled, but said nothing.

"Come," said the good lady to Helen, rather abruptly, "I have a curious picture to show you, done with a red-hot poker. It is only in the next room, which is my bedroom. Not you," putting Olga aside, "for you've seen it already—there's a magazine for you on the table."

Olga, who saw that Helen was to have a *tête-à-tête*, made no difficulty.

Directly Helen was closeted with the widow Apollonia, she found something getting into her throat, her nose, and eyes, and began to cough.

"Never mind, I can tell you what it is," said her hostess, "though I had forgotten it at the time—I have been setting my maids to put the feathers of my feather-bed into a new case, consequently the air is full of flue. I don't suppose it will settle for hours!"

Helen did not see that this was any reason for its settling in her lungs, and was going to propose a retreat at the first pause; but had to wait for it.

"Do you, now, in England," said Apollonia, sitting down by her bedside in a leisurely manner, "bee's-wax your ticks or not? Some think it a good plan, and others don't."

"I really cannot answer your question," said Helen.

"My mother was an excellent housewife," con-

tinued her companion; "but why should you stand, while I sit? I cannot bear to see it."

"I fear I must go," said Helen; "we have paid a long visit, and I hear some one speaking to Olga."

"Pooh, pooh," said Apollonia, with a very significant look, "it's only Paul Adamovitch—I heard him come in just before we quitted the room, and that's why I left Olga."

"Oh, then indeed I must go," said Helen, opening the door.

"Don't interrupt the young folks," cried Apollonia, trying to detain her. But Helen was not to be stayed; and there, on the drawing-room carpet, knelt Paul, about a yard from Olga, almost sitting on his heels at the same time, and clasping his hands in a supplicating attitude. Olga was smelling a rose, and looking embarrassed and very much amused. Paul, seeing Helen, with his aunt peering over her shoulders, thought his duty-work done, and rose; on the whole pleased that his aunt had had a glimpse of how well he had done it.

Olga and Helen were now preparing to leave the house immediately; but the silver basket and liqueurs must again make their appearance, and again Paul pressed them to eat; failing which, he did not hesitate to do so himself.

"I thought you were to have been shooting ortolans with Mr. Howard, to-day," said Olga, re-

suming her easy, every-day, conversational tone with him.

"Yes,—no," said Paul with his mouth full; "that is—we *were* to have gone, and he asked me; but I told him I had an engagement; and so I had, or, at any rate, hoped to have, you know," looking sheepishly—"an engagement with *you*."

"Oh," said Olga. "And are you going with him to-morrow?"

"No," said he, speaking briefly, and to the point, directly he was on a subject he knew himself master of; "there will be a change in the weather—the ducks fly rapidly from the open ground, and the scent of the grass is strongly perceptible."

"How goes on the History of Russia?" said Olga. "Have you got to Peter the Great yet?"

"Ah," said he, relapsing into his old manner, "you're too hard upon me; you know I've been thinking of *you*."

When they reached home, the first person they saw, to their surprise, was Alexis, standing openly on the house-steps.

"I really have brought despatches this time," said he in a low voice to Olga. "Perhaps, sudarina, you will speak for me before I return—if you have not spoken yet."

"I will, if I can," said Olga.

"I have brought a letter for you also, mademoiselle," said Alexis to Helen.

"Sudarina," said Michael, at the same instant, "my master desired to see you as soon as you returned."

"See me?" repeated Helen. "I am ready."

Michael preceded and announced her. M. Boris evidently had not expected her so soon, for he hastily shuffled a letter among some others on the table—not so hastily but that Helen saw him do so.

"Ho!—Here is a letter somewhere for you, Miss May," said he, hunting it out again, and looking slightly embarrassed at having been caught in the act of examining it. "Pray sit down—I had something to say. Oh, you have been with Olga, I understand, to Apollonia Mikhailovna's." And his brow contracted as he looked suspiciously at her. "Was that wise?"

"I am at a loss, sir, to understand you. If you mean, with regard to the chance of seeing M. Miloff—"

"I do. You are not one of his abettors and supporters, I hope?"

"Oh no, sir! And we were assured that he would be engaged with Mr. Howard."

"Mr. Howard is now writing in his own room."

"Shortly before we left Madame Miloff's house, we found that her nephew had given up his engagement."

"For purposes of his own?"

"Doubtless, sir."

"I mean with regard to Olga. You understand me, Miss May, I know. Did he see her?"

"Yes, sir."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir, for a few minutes."

"What miserably bad management! Surely I have some right to be displeased."

"It was unfortunate, sir, and very disagreeable to us both; but you need not apprehend any bad result from it. Olga refused his renewed offer in the most unequivocal manner, and has done nothing but laugh about it ever since."

"Ho!" And M. Boris's features relaxed into something like a grim smile. "Have the goodness to desire Olga to come to me. I want to speak to her."

CHAPTER XIX.

ALEXIS.

HELEN willingly retired with her precious letter, which, she could see at a glance, had been opened since it was first sealed. In a few minutes, Olga, all smiles, joined her father.

"Sit down, Olga," said he. "So you have been calling on Madame Miloff?"

"Yes, papa; it must have been done soon or late; and as I had reason to suppose Paul Adamovitch would not be at home, I thought the sooner I went the better."

"Perhaps you were right. You saw him, however?"

"None the better for him," said Olga, dimpling.

"Well, Olga, I hope you feel I have behaved to you with great kindness and indulgence in this business."

"Certainly, papa."

"You are very young to have any voice in such matters. It is what very few fathers allow, I can

assure you. I have now a more eligible offer to acquaint you with."

"Indeed?" said Olga, with a little flutter.

"Observe—I do not say to propose to you, but to acquaint you with; because this is unexceptionable and admits not of a negative. Alexis arrived in your absence—"

"Oh yes," said Olga hurriedly, "and the poor fellow looks very ill, papa—"

"Pray clear your head of Alexis's looks at present."

"Certainly, papa; only I had promised to make a little petition to you for him; and as you will probably soon send him back, and the affair you are about to speak of may put it out of my head, I thought it best just to name it while it occurred to me."

"But, having done so, you will defer it, if you please, till I have spoken on a more important subject. If you prove yourself a dutiful and docile child, I may indulge you respecting a petition so insignificant as any must be that Alexis is concerned in."

"Thank you, papa, you are very kind," said Olga, faltering.

"The Birschoffs have long been friends of ours, Olga—"

"Oh dear, papa," interrupted Olga, "I do hope you are going to say nothing about Constantine!"

"Why not?" said M. Boris, frowning.

"Because, papa, he is such a *very* stupid young man!"

"This interruption, Olga, is very unseemly and irreverent. You might have waited, I think, till I introduced the subject in the manner I considered most suitable. Since you have been so rude, however, I shall defer it. How came you to suppose I had anything to say to you about Constantine?"

"Your own words, papa."

"You did not allow me to finish my sentence," said M. Boris drily. "You had better not, in future, refuse gentlemen's proposals till you know they are made."

Olga blushed like the morning.

"You will now have the goodness to take pen, ink, and paper, and write a courteous note to Madame Birschoff, inviting her and her family to spend a few weeks with us before the fine weather breaks up."

Olga prepared to comply. Country houses in Russia are so frequently crowded with guests, that she had often complained that her father's was an exception to the general rule; yet now she would gladly have dispensed with any additional visitors.

"Let me see it," said M. Boris, when she had finished.

Olga handed the note to him, and played with her pen.

"Your handwriting is much improved," said her father.

"Thanks to Miss May, papa."

He read in silence. "How is this?" said he. "You have only asked them for a week—I said a few weeks."

"I am sure you will be tired of them, papa, long before the end of a fortnight."

"That is my affair, not yours. Write it over again. And do not end with 'believe me, &c. &c.,' but write at full length, 'yours, with affectionate respect.'"

Olga wrote, but with less neatness and care. She was much annoyed.

"This is worse written," said M. Boris, revising the second edition; "but it may go. You have only put 'yours respectfully,' however."

Olga sat silent, and rather stubborn.

M. Boris rang the bell, and gave orders for Alexis to prepare himself to carry this note immediately to Madame Birschoff, on his way home.

"And now, Olga," said he, as soon as the door was closed, "I expect you to show how well and gracefully you can do the honours of my house. To entertain a couple of young men like Mr. Howard and Henri is one thing; to entertain elderly married people, wealthy and well-born, is another. You will now have an opportunity of showing what Miss May has done for you—of proving to me whether I have done wrong in giving you so young a protectress,

and in placing you at so early an age at the head of my house."

"Certainly, papa, I hope to give you satisfaction."

"Let everything be done elegantly and without stinginess."

"Then I must have money, papa."

"Well, you may draw moderately upon me; but the estate supplies our table."

"Of course, in butter, eggs, fish, poultry, and so forth; but the house is in horrible condition, and quite unfit for the inspection of the keen-sighted Madame Birschoff. She will see directly, papa, how things are."

"Well," said he reluctantly, after an uneasy pause, "do what is absolutely wanting, but I am sure it cannot be in the way of substantial repairs. Whitewash and yellow wash, if you will; even a little stencilling I have no objection to."

"Oh, papa, that will look beggarly!"

"For the inferior rooms, I was about to say, if you had not interrupted. The best rooms are panelled, and only require bee's-wax and dry-rubbing."

"You are speaking, papa, as if we had as many *babas* as my great grandfather. Consider how short of hands we are."

"Take on more, then, if you want them, to the end of the season. It is a well-known fact, however,

that the more servants you keep, the worse the work is done."

"I am sure I have not the least objection," said Olga, "to go on with our present household, if you are willing to postpone Madame Birschoff's visit till the house is ready to receive her."

"Which you would take care should not be in a hurry," said M. Boris quickly. "No, no; the first expense will be cheapest in the end. Set the house in order, then, under Miss May's direction; and if it be well done, at a reasonable cost, I shall not complain."

"I fear we may have some difference of opinion hereafter," said Olga, "respecting reasonable and unreasonable. However, papa, I accept your *carte-blanche*, and will immediately begin executing your commands. And now, papa, about Alexis—"

"Alexis?—what of him?" said M. Boris, as if in surprise.

"You promised that if I complied with your wishes, which I have done, you would grant me a request."

"What wishes have you complied with?"

"Writing the note, and undertaking to set the house in order."

"Ho! ho! ho! You can't suppose those were the wishes I was alluding to, can you? A very different thing, indeed! However, let me hear what you want."

"Dear papa,"—and Olga tried her most conciliating tone,—"you know poor Alexis wants to marry Stephanie."

"Well?" And his brow grew black as night.

"And Stephanie wants to marry Alexis."

"Well?" still gruffer.

"You know, papa, it will require some self-sacrifice in me to give up Stephanie's services; whereas Alexis's being married will make no difference at all to you."

"I don't require you to make a self-sacrifice."

"But I am willing to make it, if you will just consent, in order that they may be happy."

"I'll *not* consent!" And his clenched hand came down on the table with the force of a sledge-hammer. "It *would* make a difference to me; and I don't care about their being happy! Alexis is a vile, malicious, perfidious wretch—a villain, deserving no better reward than the knout—a treacherous rascal, that will get his deserts, some day, in Siberia. Once for all, they shall *never* marry!—Alexis! you mean, eaves-dropping dog! what are you standing there in the doorway for, listening to every word I say?"

"I obey orders," said Alexis calmly.

"There are your despatches, sir! Take them, and be gone! Directly you have left those two letters at M. Birschoff's, return to your post. I shall look in on you at a moment you expect not."

Alexis took up the letters without a word, and retired with perfect self-command.

"What does he mean by being so deadly quiet?" said M. Boris, ready to grind his teeth. "It's not natural to him—he's sulky; and sulky dogs are rabid. Let me never hear a word from you again, Olga, in his behalf!"

Olga, trembling and speechless, left him without a word. In the corridor she met Henri, humming a tune.

"Dearest Olga, what is the matter?" cried he, in alarm; "you are as white as death."

"Nothing of consequence, thank you," said she, with tears starting the moment she spoke.

"Nothing? But you are weeping!" And he took her hand.

"My father has been so severe to Alexis—I would rather not say any more about it now, Henri—I would rather go to Helen."

With a sympathising look, he let her go. In the vestibule she met Alexis.

"Sudarina," said he, looking very white, but speaking very quietly and steadily, "do not intercede for me any more. I can see, and you can, that it will be of no use. You will acquit me of eavesdropping; for Michael brought me M. Boris's orders to repair to him directly, and I was only acting in obedience to them. But I am glad I heard what

I did: there can now be no mistake. Thank you, sudarina, for your kind intervention. Stephanie and I have taken leave of each other. We await better times."

He kissed her hand, and departed.

Olga hastened to Helen, who was still engaged with her English letter.

"What is the matter?" said Helen.

"Oh, you have a letter from your home. I will not intrude on you now."

"Do not go away," said Helen. "Something has vexed you, and my letter has had the bloom taken off."

"The seal!" said Olga. "Ah, all alike!" And throwing herself on the ground, she rested her head on Helen's lap.

"What is the matter?"

"Papa has been so unkind, so cruel, to Alexis! Poor Alexis has behaved very, very well."

"Well, Olga, I am extremely sorry for him; but I fear we can do him no good. He must hope for better times."

"That is what he says. Have you seen him?"

"Oh, no."

"His composure is unnatural; I am rather afraid of what it may portend.—Well, but, Helen, we are going to have visitors! Papa began with a long preamble of so ominous a kind that I thought he had

something to communicate which he knew I should not like; instead of which, it all ended in his desiring me to invite the Birschoffs to spend a few weeks with us."

"You were agreeably surprised."

"It might have been worse; but I cannot say I like it, for I think it will lead to no good. However, I must make the best of it; and papa is so very desirous Madame Birschoff should spy no defects in our ruinous old house, that he has given me *carte-blanche* for all reasonable repairs, under your direction. Is not that delightful? The visit is an uncertain evil, but the refitting is a certain good."

Never very anxious concerning the future, Olga immediately began to consider what wanted doing, what she wanted to do, and what would be the probable cost. Her first estimate was so unreasonable, that Helen was obliged to reduce it to nearly half. Then came a graduated scale of "needfuls" and "desirables," balanced by "doubtfuls" and "unattainables." After considerable time and trouble, Olga made out a pretty good scheme; and then began to consider the qualifications of the serfs who would best execute her orders.

"It is a good thing Alexis is so friendly to me," said she, "for I must get him to send me many things I shall want; and if they were for papa's

pleasure, rather than mine, he would be purposely dull and unaccommodating. But he knows well enough that upholstery and fancy articles are the last things my father would willingly spend money upon; and therefore I must even desire him not to exceed my commissions."

Soon the sounds of hammers and screws began to grate very unpleasantly on the ears of Mr. Howard and Henri; while clouds of dust from walls that were being stripped of old cornices and draperies filled the air.

"What is all this grand commotion about?" said Henri, coming to Olga rather uneasily.

"Nothing less than an impending visit from the Birschoffs," said Olga.

"What, *young* Birschoff?—is *he* coming?"

"I have every reason to think he is. Now, don't look so dreadfully dismal."

"Not dismal at all," said Henri stoutly; "only that he is a very tiresome fellow, and will quite spoil our little party."

"Completely."

"Come, if you think so too, it's some compensation."

"I do think so, I assure you."

"Why did you invite them, then?"

"Papa insisted on it."

"He is not usually fond of guests."

"By no means: this is evidently a special case."

"Ah, Olga, I'm afraid some harm will come of it!"

"What sort of harm?"

"I have a presentiment of evil. I think the old people are concocting a match between you and Constantine."

"There's no knowing," said Olga.

"Can you think of such a thing patiently?"

"Where's the use of being impatient?"

"Olga, you alarm me! Could you enter into an engagement of this sort without making an effort—a struggle?"

"I don't think I could," said Olga; "but I have never been tried: and till we are put to the proof, we never really know our own strength or weakness."

"This makes me wretched!" cried Henri, starting up, and walking about the room.

"But, after all, it may come to nothing," said Olga; "you are frightening yourself needlessly, perhaps. I am very much obliged to you, however, for sympathising so much with me. Perhaps, if things come to the worst, I may call upon you to take my part."

"You may rely upon me. But, dear Olga, why talk of being obliged to me? We are obliged to people for performing voluntary acts of kindness towards us which cost them some pain or trouble.

Now, so far from its being any trouble or pain to me to do anything whatever for you, it is the greatest pleasure in my existence."

"I am very much obliged to you," repeated Olga, looking down.

"No, Olga, it is I who am obliged—obliged to tell you that I would do *anything* for you. In former times, I used to think you had many faults, and I told you of them without scruple—sometimes too roughly, perhaps."

"Oh, no!"

"But now you have conquered them."

"That's quite a mistake, I am sorry to say."

"Well, we all have faults, Olga, of course; but you—in short, you are altogether—no, I won't use that ridiculous word—charming; I won't make you vain, Olga," looking at her with tender affection; "I will only say you are all that the heart and mind of a good and sensible man could wish."

"If I am in the way of becoming such, it is something," said Olga. "But good and sensible men are not very rife among us, I'm afraid, Henri. And if they were, it would make no difference to papa, unless they had plenty of money."

"How fond he is of Mr. Howard!" cried Henri suddenly. "Can you account for it?"

"In some degree. Mr. Howard took my father's part one day, when he was quarrelling violently with

Alexis. Papa first drives Alexis to desperation, and then is afraid of the consequences. He was in bodily fear then, and considered Mr. Howard a protector. Another time, some malicious person played a hoax upon papa, and induced him to set off for Moscow, on what he expected to be some very unpleasant business; I think he was afraid of Siberia. Mr. Howard went with him, and again his presence inspired papa with confidence. You see, there are not many people who take papa's part, and so he feels rather grateful for it."

"No doubt," said Henri, with an equivocal smile. "I do not think my uncle's gratitude will ever exceed discreet bounds. Is this Englishman rich?"

"I do not know."

"My uncle will not like him if he is not."

"Why?"

"As a son-in-law, for instance."

"What question is there of him in that relation?" said Olga, blushing deeply. "You must be dreaming."

"Olga! why do you blush?"

"I wonder how you can ask!" and she started up to go away.

"You *must* explain!"

"What is there to explain?" And she ran off.

"I don't believe she has understood me, after all!" thought Henri.

CHAPTER XX.

THE VISITORS.

AS soon as an answer could possibly be received, Olga had a note from Madame Birschoff, accepting the invitation for herself, her husband, and son.

"There is a great deal too much of 'dear Olga' and 'sweet Olga' in this," said Olga. "I now always distrust such lavish professions, though once they pleased me."

"How long ago?" said Henri, looking up with a smile from a little water-colour drawing he was making.

"Last winter," said Olga honestly. "However, I must make the best of it, and you and Mr. Howard must help me as much as you can."

"Suppose we get the old lady into the swing, or the merry-go-round," said Mr. Howard, taking a great deal too much red in his brush; "that would be fine fun!"

"You must not call her old, Mr. Howard, if you mean to win her good graces, I can tell you! Madame Birschoff is still thought by some a very fine woman, and is at any rate a very fine lady."

"If she's young, all the easier to amuse her," said Mr. Howard. "There's an old target; we'll have some pistol practice."

"Or suppose we get up some good charades?" said Henri; "you have a private theatre."

"The most melancholy place in the house," said Olga. "It seems full of the ghosts of departed follies. Besides, our party is too small, and we do not want to increase it. If we make the house too pleasant to them, they will stay too long."

"So we fall back upon the swing," said Mr. Howard. "We must take care the lady doesn't fall *from* it. Is she heavy?"

"Why, yes," said Olga, smiling. "I will tell the carpenters to look to it."

"And the boat is spoiling for want of paint."

"Ah, I am afraid the season is too much advanced for boating. You see Paul Adamovitch was quite right about the change of weather. We have had rain every day since. The boat, however, may as well be painted."

"Wouldn't Paul Adamovitch make a favourable diversion of the enemy now and then?" suggested Mr. Howard, rubbing ultra-marine. "What a

capital moujik!" looking over Henri's shoulder. "What's the reason mine looks so bad?"

"Too full a brush," suggested Henri.

"Rather pre-Raffaelite colouring, eh?"

"Pre-Adamite, it strikes me," said Henri.

"Can't you advise anything?"

"A sponge, perhaps," said Henri. "But I think a fresh sheet of cartridge paper would be better."

"That is too bad," said Helen, looking up from her writing. However, on seeing Mr. Howard's moujik, she said that if he would sketch the figure again, she would tint it a little.

Henri gave an amused look; but, glancing at his performance, she said she thought the colouring too neutral; it gave the effect of moonlight rather than sunshine. So his elation was a little checked.

It was no unusual thing for Helen to correct the drawings, the singing, the composition, and even the opinions of these gentlemen; and yet her influence was so gentle that no one had the idea of her being governess all round. Slang, and cant expressions, ungrammatical phrases, silly expletives, loose reasonings, fled before her without her using heavier weapons than a little ridicule or serious common-sense. Even M. Boris had given up swearing in her hearing. Frequently Mr. Howard had put a chapter of his book into her hands, saying, "There, Miss May, do correct that for me, if you can. Don't

spare me! Be as severe as you like!" And she took him at his word; drew her pencil through needless repetitions, changed superlatives for comparatives, retrenched adjectives, shortened sentences, and added colons and semicolons to commas and full-stops; besides setting an occasional "*qy?*" against the opinions themselves. These queries always led to debates and discussions, in which, even if Helen were sometimes defeated, Mr. Howard found his own ideas wonderfully cleared, and his opinions confirmed; while at other times he would frankly own himself wrong, and erase the passage; saying, "It is better to have a rap over the knuckles from you than from the critics." Henri, though exceedingly well-informed for a Russian, was not accustomed to this kind of conversation; he had met with witty talkers, dazzling talkers, in St. Petersburg and in the provinces, but Helen's cultivated mind and calm good sense were as new as delightful to him; they "allured to brighter worlds and led the way."

On the eve of their visitors' arrival, Helen was summoned to M. Boris's study. She could not bear these interviews, but was obliged to submit to them. After a preparatory cough,—

"Our guests," said he, "will soon be here. Everything in Olga's province, I trust, is as it should be?"

"Everything, I think, sir," said Helen. "Madame Birschoff's apartment is tasteful, and even elegant. You have inspected M. Birschoff's morning-room, I believe; and we have written out the dinner-cards ourselves. Perhaps you would like to see them?"

"No, no, I neither understand nor care for these matters—all I shall have to do will be to pay the bills; and that is enough. You have known me sufficiently long, Miss May, to be aware that I am a plain, quiet man, without any taste for society. I hope my putting myself out of my way on the present occasion will not be pains lost."

He looked inquiringly at Helen, who knew not exactly what the mute question implied.

"I hope not, sir," said she.

"Olga's future prospects"—resumed M. Boris—"I am now speaking to you in confidence—her future prospects depend much on this visit. Her future prospects are not unimportant to you, I hope?"

"No, sir, I have learnt to take the liveliest interest in them."

"That is well. On my part, I have learnt to repose the greatest confidence in you. For so young a person you are remarkably sedate and discreet. I have watched you closely, I assure you!" ("I have no doubt of it," thought Helen.) "You may now be of the greatest use to me, and to Olga. She is, naturally, heedless and perverse, but your influence

over her is such, that you may easily direct her line of conduct. She will take her tone from you: and if she thinks you favourably impressed by our guests, if you take every indirect way of commending them—"

"I can do nothing indirect," interrupted Helen.

M. Boris paused, gave her one of his hard, cold looks, and resumed.

"—I need not use the word; what I mean is, that you should take every opportunity to place them in a right and favourable light."

"In a *right* light, as far as in me lies," said Helen; "and I always make favourable constructions when I can."

"Well," said M. Boris, after another pause, "that is all, I suppose, I am to expect from you. There is a sort of unyieldingness about you, occasionally, Miss May, which I can only ascribe to nationality."

Helen bowed.

"In short," continued he more quickly, "make her like them as much as you can, and make them like her as much as you can; and get on, all of you, as well as you can together, and it will be the better for all parties in the end; for the young people must come together eventually, happen what will. And here they are!"

Helen immediately retired, right glad that the interview was over, while M. Boris hastened to welcome his guests.

The next fortnight passed very much as fortnights usually pass in country-houses full of company. Late breakfasts needlessly prolonged, newspapers to look over, lounging on sofas, letters to write, dogs to caress, the news of the day to talk over, morning visits to pay, long drives to take, long toilettes to make before dinner; fishing and shooting for the gentlemen, embroidery for the ladies; music for the young, cards for the old.

Helen's last letter from England had brought her information concerning Mr. Howard. It annoyed her that it should have been shared with M. Boris. Her mother wrote:—

"The Mr. H—— you speak of is *not* the Mr. H—— your friend Isabella Graham used to talk of, but a first-cousin of his, an only son, and a man of good fortune, who has been very kind and generous to his widowed mother and portionless sisters. One of the latter has married a cousin of Isabella's, a poor curate, who, through Mr. H——, has been presented to a good living. Mr. H—— has a nice little estate in Suffolk, out at nurse at present, while he travels, as his benefactions to his family have rather straitened him; but he means to return in a few months, and gives out that he shall be a jolly bachelor, take his mother and unmarried sister to live with him, and repair the church, vicarage, and old mansion-house."

Helen was reading this letter for the twentieth time, when Olga came in, sat down beside her, and put her arm round her waist. Helen laid aside her letter.

"Helen," said Olga rather reproachfully, "I let you see all my letters, but you never show me any of yours."

"This is from my *mother*," said Helen.

"It must be very delightful to have a mother—a mother whom we can entirely trust and love," said Olga pensively.

"Only, it is so hard to be apart from her," said Helen; and a tear started into her eye. Olga kissed it away.

"I wonder what she thinks of me," said she; "for of course you tell her everything about me. Does she consider me a very naughty girl?"

"Oh no, she is beginning to like you very much."

"That must be owing to you, you dear Helen. But I came to consult with you. Don't you think we get on very stupidly with Madame Birschoff? She can do nothing but praise Petersburg and her son; she continually yawns, and that sets me yawning too. Just now she is taking a little nap. Would it not be more enlivening, think you, to invite some more people?"

"How would M. Boris like it?"

"He is so bent on pleasing the Birschoffs, and he

finds it such hard work, that I don't think he would mind. The question is, whom to ask."

"You have not a great many to choose from. What say you to Madame Miloff?"

"Apollonia? Oh, the good creature never stirs from her home! And if she did, it would be with Paul at her elbow."

"There are the two Miss Prascoffs."

"My dear Helen! what can you be thinking of? Those stupid girls!"

"Well, you say you think their stupidity is chiefly owing to their want of society, and you frequently pity them for pining so for a little change, and never having it."

"That is true," said Olga wistfully. "Do you think it would be a good action?"

"What should *you* think about it in their place?"

"I certainly should! I should be delighted! And I dare say they will not be much in the way. Well then, Helen, I will invite them; that is, if papa consents. Apollonia, too;—it is worth a trial; she is really a favourite of mine, and Paul and Constantine may bestow their stupidity upon one another."

Olga thought the scheme so desirable, that, the instant she had secured her father's consent, she sent off her invitations. Her note occasioned a tremendous commotion in the small household of Madame Prascoff, who was always depreciating the

pleasures of society to her incredulous daughters, because she could not afford to let them enter it. On the present occasion they took her by storm, and she was more easily overcome because she herself was included in the invitation; and the prospect of spending a week under the same roof with two or three unmarried gentlemen made her not altogether despair of some good result to her daughters.

So every needle in the house was instantly set to work on book-muslin, pink tarletan, blue tarletan; while Madame Prascoff undertook to construct for herself one or two surprising head-dresses, and superintend the making of a new black satin dress. It was a pity the invitation had not been sent sooner, for two days was terribly short notice. However, wonders were done in those two days; and at the appointed time they started in their old coach for Vogdolitch, as fine as Cinderella's step-mother and sisters.

As for the good Apollonia, she was still so reluctant to give up all hope of Olga's compassionating Paul, that, contrary to habits the growth of years, she tore herself from her home, to give him a chance which she flattered herself she might render a somewhat less forlorn one.

The increase of chattering was very great when these additions to the circle were assembled for dinner; and the pink tarletan, the blue tarletan, and

the surprising head-dress, enlivened the old drawing-room uncommonly. Madame Birschoff's round eyes widened with pleasurable sensations as she saw one lady after another sail into the room; and Olga secretly revelled in setting her to talk to Madame Prascoff, and inducing Constantine and Paul to bestow their welcome attention on Serafina and Elizabeth. Apollonia she kept for herself; she was too good for the common herd; and Apollonia, as merry as a bird, was well content to find herself placed between Olga and Helen.

"Admirably planted out!" muttered Henri to Mr. Howard.

"Well distributed," was the reply. "Good furniture pictures!"

Nearly the same distribution took place at dinner, and prevailed afterwards, till the card-tables were opened. Paul, indeed, hovered about Olga; but she managed to content him with a few cheerful nothings, and then glided away to another guest; so that he found himself presently in his old position in front of Serafina Prascoff, whom he began to think a tolerably agreeable girl.

Constantine, however, would by no means be put off upon Elizabeth, but continued to molest Olga by his endeavours to win her attention throughout the evening. The good-natured Apollonia could not help taking a little malicious pleasure in watching

his continual discomfitures, and as frequent returns to the field.

"Ah," said she aside to Helen, "it is easy to see our dear Olga does not like that young man; and yet he will not see it himself. How blind we all are! If it were not so, how could he possibly suppose that, with such manners as his, he could ingratiate himself with so charming a girl? She has sense, taste, cultivation; whereas he has not one of the three. I overheard him at dinner-time talking so inanely, you cannot think. If my Paul is more countrified, he is not quite so stupid. He seems getting on very well, I see, with the youngest Miss Prascoff. Has she any sense, do you think?"

Helen rather disingenuously replied that her opportunities of judging of her had been few.

"I am desirous Paul should attach himself to persons of sense," resumed Apollonia, "because none can impart what they do not possess. Now, it was the greatest pleasure to me that your English guest, Mr. Howard, took him up in the way he did at first, because it was so improving; but of late, I am sorry to say, he seems to have dropped him and taken up Henri Illarionovitch instead. I shall accuse him of it, too. Mr. Howard! Mr. Howard!"

"Madam?" returned Mr. Howard, smilingly obeying the summons.

"Come and talk with us a little, if you please,

Mr. Howard, as I observe you are only overlooking the players. I have something to say to you."

Mr. Howard immediately drew a chair in front of her and Helen, and placed himself on it in an attitude of polite attention.

"You were kind enough, sir, to bestow a good deal of your leisure, some weeks ago, on my nephew Paul; but I fear you have grown tired of him."

"Tired, ma'am! Oh no! He got tired of me!"

"Surely that was impossible—you must be under some mistake. He *could* not be tired of you, my dear sir!"

"Well, my dear ma'am, it looked very much like it. At your particular desire, I spoke to him on several subjects—"

"Thank you! thank you! that was exactly what I wished."

"—Till he got so desperately tired of them or of me, that it could not be concealed."

"Oh fie! I am shocked! That was so very wrong of Paul! So very, very rude! I must speak to him about it."

"My dear lady, you had much better desist. Water finds its own level; so does the soul of man. Your nephew is at this moment sitting under the influence of a far more successful teacher than myself. We men can never polish one another nor ourselves: 'tis you ladies who do that. The fact is ascertained throughout civilized creation."

"Upon my word, Mr. Howard, it is quite a privilege to hear you talk—it is, indeed, sir! I assure you I do not regret having broken through my established habits to come here and join this pleasing circle."

"Man has been called the creature of habit, ma'am; but there is no reason why he should be its slave. You see, I'm a native of a free country, and don't like slavery in any form; so you must excuse me."

"Of course—of course! We must all allow for national prejudices. But now, what do you think, sir, of this dear country of ours — old mother Russia?"

"Plenty of capabilities, madam!—plenty of capabilities!"

"That's just what I think; and just what I say of Paul. Both are susceptible of more cultivation, but both have capabilities."

"Doubtless," said Mr. Howard, with a slight cough. "Your nephew is an excellent sportsman; he brings down a broom-rail on the wing."

"A man who excels in one thing sometimes excels in another," said Apollonia.

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Howard.

"Do *you* think so?" said Apollonia, appealing to Helen.

"Certainly," said Helen. "I think it is often the case."

"Then a man who is a good sportsman may be a good husband?" said Apollonia.

"He *may*," said Mr. Howard, laughing; "just as a good coachman may be a good brewer, or a good accountant may be a good carpenter."

"Your images, my dear sir, are so very dissimilar. But I am persuaded—yes, I am confident—Paul will be a very good husband."

"Only under one condition," said Mr. Howard solemnly—so solemnly that he riveted the attention of both his listeners. "Only under one condition," repeated he, shaking his head.

"What can that be?" cried Apollonia.

"That he *marries!*" said Mr. Howard, laughing; and he rose, and walked away.

He soon returned, however; and, keeping clear of Paul Miloff, talked so nicely, that Helen and Apollonia were both entertained and interested. On the whole, the evening went off very pleasantly.

In the course of a few days, however, Olga became desperately tired of the Miss Prascoffs. They could neither play, sing, talk, nor listen well; but their self-confidence being great, their thin, high-pitched voices were continually drowning the better-modulated tones of those who were conversing sensibly; while small scandals, pert ridicules, shallow flatteries and shallower sentiment, formed the staple of their talk. The swing and merry-go-round had little rest in fine weather, and the clear autumnal air rang with

their shrill screams and thin laughter; but indoors, they lay listlessly on sofas, turning over the leaves of novels without reading them, and interrupting the occupations of others by their frivolities, or yawning undisguisedly if they thought themselves neglected.

"How brightly our Olga shines by force of contrast," observed Mr. Howard to Henri, as they set out with their fowling-pieces one morning.

"Surely it is not the custom of your country to call young ladies by their Christian names, unless you are related, or going to be related to them," said Henri tartly.

"Surely you have been long enough in England, to know it is not the custom of our country to salute young ladies as you saluted Miss May on your arrival here, unless you are related, or going to be related to them?" retorted Mr. Howard.

Henri bit his lip. "Two wrongs don't make a right," observed he. "However, perhaps you meditate becoming related to one of them; in which case, of course, my objection falls to the ground."

"Perhaps I do," said Mr. Howard oracularly.

"May I ask, to which?" inquired Henri quickly.

"That hardly sounds to me like a very sensible question," said Mr. Howard.

"Certainly I've no claim to your confidence," said Henri, growing hot.

"There are many things to be considered," said Mr. Howard.

"Doubtless," said Henri.

"Perhaps I might not get consent."

"Very likely," said Henri.

"However, I'm not quite hopeless," said Mr. Howard.

"Oh, nor I," cried Henri, waxing more and more wrathful; "you are such a favourite, nobody could say no to you."

"Gently, my friend; your tone sounds anything but amicable. I have by no means so strong a conviction that nobody could say no."

"You are such a favourite with my uncle," burst forth Henri, "that he could refuse you nothing."

"Nothing?" repeated Mr. Howard drily. "Well, I fancy he could refuse me a good many things. However, in this affair, his is not the first consent that is likely to be asked."

"Do you mean to win and woo her without it?" exclaimed Henri, with flashing eyes.

"What if I do?" said Mr. Howard coolly. "If he's your uncle, he is not mine. One thing at a time. Win her first, and tell him afterwards."

"I doubt if he will let you take her out of the empire."

"Ho! ho! ho! We'll see about that!"

"Mr. Howard," cried Henri in a rage, "I doubt if it is not my duty to acquaint him immediately with your intentions."

"Make your mind quite up what your duty is,

and then act upon it. That's my advice, and it's what I do myself. Only you seem to me rather officiously putting your finger into another man's pie."

"My relationship—" began Henri.

"Oh—aye, aye—your relationship, of course!" interrupted Mr. Howard, who was himself beginning to feel considerably irritated. "That's the way people excuse themselves to themselves, and try to excuse themselves to others—only they never do. Your relationship! You would like, I believe, to be still nearer related!"

"Who says that?" cried Henri.

"Clear as the sun! No good denying it to *me*—'A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind;' or if it does not, it makes us wondrous quick in detecting one another."

"You deal in allegories," said Henri impatiently.

"Well, we shall not have leisure to deal with them much longer; for here come a bevy of young ladies to the water-side, with Olga Ivanovna" (emphatically) "and young Birschoff coming down another alley, looking daggers at one another."

It really symbolized the case; for Olga looked extremely incensed with Constantine, and he looked not only mortified, but very angry. The Miss Prascoffs, Helen, and Paul, came up at the same time; while the two elder ladies were seen in the distance,

at the head of the alley down which Olga and Constantine had just passed.

All seemed making for the boat. A pleasure-party had been so much harped on by Serafina and Elizabeth, that it had been hastily got up; Olga observing that, if they were quick, they should reach Mr. Howard and Henri soon enough to ask them to give up their snipe-shooting.

Constantine began unmooring the boat in a very hurried manner; and hastily and clumsily raising one of the oars in nearly a perpendicular direction, he hit Mr. Howard's fowling-piece with it. There was a report, a scream; and Helen fell.

"Wretch!—O my Helen!"

These words were unconsciously uttered by Mr. Howard, as he caught her up in his arms, and tenderly bore her towards the house.

All was confusion and affright. Olga, bathed in tears, was close beside him; Apollonia following them as fast as she could; Madame Birschoff swooning on a bank; Madame Prascoff offering her a smelling-bottle; Serafina and Elizabeth, after shrieking a little, were asking a thousand irrelevant questions of Paul, who shifted from one foot to another, looking very uneasy; young Birschoff, after swearing once or twice, hastily made off. Henri was the only one who thought of a doctor; he darted towards the house, repeating to himself, "*My* Helen!"

CHAPTER XXI.

EXPLANATIONS.

"SO we were at cross purposes all the time?" said Henri to Mr. Howard, on the evening of the day on which Helen was shot.

"Yes," said Mr. Howard huskily; for, in spite of his English manhood, he had been crying very heartily, and was now sitting, shut up, in his own room, to which Henri had obtained admittance only by dint of repeated taps and solicitations.

"What a bear you must have thought me!" said Henri.

"What a goose you *were*, begging your pardon. What in the world should I want with a Russian wife, when there were plenty, and too many, of good English ones to be had for proper asking? Not at the first asking, though,—some of 'em. Why, now, here have I made three offers to Miss May in this very house!—"

"Is it possible?"

"Fact. The first time was when you were giving

Olga a spin in the merry-go-round. That time, she laughed at me. The next time, I wrote to her: she took no notice of it. The third time, just two days ago, she was hurt—called it persecution—said I made her position very trying to her—she must leave it—she must tell M. Boris—she must go home—she would have done so before, but for love of Olga. Well, I would not leave it so—I would not be put down. I put her to the question—Did she hate me? No. Did she know any ill of me? No. Did she think it would disoblige her friends? No. Had she taken a vow to die single? No. By this time she began to smile; so I took advantage of that, and kept on at it, you see, sir—(I just mention it to you, as a young man, by way of example)—till she said, at last, she would write to her mother."

"So here we are," resumed he, after a short but not uncomplacent pause,—"here we are; but here we are not long likely to be, for she says I must go away till she gets her answer; and I actually meant to have gone to-morrow. However, here we are, as I said before; and here I shall remain, that's flat, till she gets better; for nobody could expect me to turn out under present circumstances. Here I shall remain till she gets better, unless poor Helen dies. Oh dear!—oh!" And his silk pocket-handkerchief was again cast over his face and head.

"What a mess the whole house is in!" resumed

he presently, withdrawing the handkerchief. "Olga and the widow Apollonia, like a pair of ministering angels, hovering round my Helen!"

"Come, you need not class them together," said Henri. "You may call Olga a ministering angel, if you please."

"But the old lady is a wonderful creature, too—an old angel: we've an inn, in London, called the Old Angel. Stephanie says nobody could have probed the wounds and extracted the shot as she did. Why, she quite cut out the red-nosed little doctor—left him nothing to do but to prescribe a quieting draught! People's real characters come out on these occasions. See, what a poor, useless, selfish creature Madame Birschoff is; and Madame Prascoff nearly as bad. As for the Prascoff girls, they are seizing the opportunity to lay close siege to Paul Adamovitch; and I think it very likely Serafina will carry him off. M. Boris is raging because Olga has refused young Birschoff; and is shut up with the father, while the son has turned sulky. Olga is lucky in having a pretext for shutting herself up in Helen's room. She won't escape the tempest, though, when she comes out. If these people had any delicacy, they would all go off to their homes, and leave the house quiet."

"They *are* going soon," said Henri. "Madame Birschoff is very angry with Olga, and was for leaving immediately; I heard her telling her husband she

should have one serious conference with her, and, if it were unfavourable, depart at once. She says such independence in a young girl is intolerable, and all owing to her bad training; *her* Constantine shall not suffer indignities! I shall give Olga a hint of this, the first time I see her; she will then soon afford Madame Birschoff the opportunity she desires, and the separation will speedily follow. The Prascoffs only came for a limited time, which has almost expired: Apollonia's presence here is extremely valuable, and she is too kind-hearted to go away while Miss May is in danger, while Paul is such a good-natured nonentity that he is perfectly innoxious."

"Well," groaned Mr. Howard, "I pray for Helen's speedy recovery, though it will be the signal for my departure. You could not go once more, could you, to glean some fresh tidings?"

"I'll go directly," said Henri, rising. He left the room, and proceeded to a little storeroom at the end of the corridor, where Stephanie squeezed lemons, rinsed wine-glasses, &c. for Helen, and where he had once or twice seen her already, and procured news how all was going on in the sick-room. At present, however, only Olga was there. She was leaning her head against the window, with her handkerchief at her eyes.

"Dear Olga," said he, "may I come in? How sorry I am for you!"

"Oh, Henri, how sorry I am for *her*," replied Olga, weeping. "What *shall* I do if I lose her?"

"I hope, and think that you will not. Dr. Kiloff assured me he did not apprehend a fatal result."

"I hope he will prove in the right; but I fear—I fear!—Oh, Henri! she is in such a heavenly state of mind! If I were in her place, should I be so?"

"I hope you would."

"I fear I should not. She has given me all her directions what to do, in the event of her death, with such composedness! They were very few and simple. Some tears fell when she dictated a letter to her mother—they were the only ones she shed. She desired kind little tokens might be given to the servants—little memorials to you and to Mr. Howard. Everything of value to be sent to her mother, of course. She gave me some excellent advice—I think I can never forget it."

Olga wept anew.

"Then," resumed she, "she bade me get her little Prayer-book, and read the prayers for the sick —beautiful prayers they were!—And then, she desired me to take her little Bible, and read several of the concluding chapters of the Gospel of St. John. I began with the death of Lazarus, and read quite on to the end of St. John's Gospel. Oh, Henri! what a heavenly book! Why is it not in the hands of all, and why are we not always reading it? When

I reached the concluding verses, which I read very low, I found she had dropped asleep. I then left her in charge of Apollonia, and stole in here."

At this moment, Stephanie entered—

"Sudarina, M. Boris is inquiring for you."

"Tell him, Stephanie, I really cannot come. Stay—do you go, Henri, and make my excuses to him. He will take them better from you. How are they all getting on down stairs, Stephanie?"

"The young ladies are playing shuttlecock with M. Miloff."

"That is well."

"And the old ladies are playing preference."

"That is very well. Tell them, Henri, I will come down, by and by." And she returned to Helen's room.

Olga sat up all night long, for the first time in her life. It was good discipline for her. Madame Miloff had insisted, and Stephanie had entreated she would resign her charge to them; but strong affection made her keep her post. Stephanie slept in the adjoining dressing-room, and often stole in. At intervals, Olga read Helen's little Bible; then mused on what she had read.

Towards midnight, Helen, who, by great self-control, had hitherto been able to lie quite quiet and still, became feverish and rather light-headed.

"I know I am talking nonsense," said she pre-

sently, "but I cannot help it. I seem to be going home very fast in an old drosky with Alexis, and somebody riding behind me very hard, but never able to come up. Olga, do you think you can cut off a lock of my hair?"

"Oh, yes," said Olga.

She was afraid, however, of taking it down, for fear of being unable to put it up again, and yet was reluctant to disfigure her by cutting it where it would be missed.

"I think I had better call Stephanie," said Olga.

"No, no," said Helen, "don't be afraid." And she drew out the gold pin that confined the beautiful chestnut tresses.

"Cut out a good piece," said she feverishly. "There, that will do nicely. Lay it aside somewhere; and if I die, let Mr. Howard carry it to mamma; and tell him he may keep a lock of it himself."

This seemed all very simple to Olga.

"And now," said Helen, "if you will read me one or two of the Psalms, I think it may keep me from wandering; I have heard of their producing that effect on persons inclined to be light-headed."

Olga did as she was desired, in her soft, soothing voice; and found Helen become perfectly still and quiet. Soon after, she heard a hushed footfall outside the door, and softly opened it to see who was

there. Mr. Howard, in his slippers, stood a little way off.

"Quiet?" whispered he.

Olga nodded, put her finger on her lips, and softly closed the door. Helen heard it, however.

"Who was it?" cried she.

"Only Mr. Howard," said Olga, kissing her. "Lie quiet, dear Helen."

"*Only* Mr. Howard." Helen smiled quietly, as she repeated the words mentally; and soon she was repeating them aloud, without knowing it, to the great surprise of the alarmed Olga.

"Mamma!" cried Helen suddenly, starting up in her bed.

"Hush, hush, dear Helen, it is only your own dear Olga; lie down, dearest, you will displace the bandages."

"She's there!" cried Helen.

"No, darling, it is only Stephanie."

"Ah—" Helen dropped dejectedly on her pillow.

Olga put her cheek next to Helen's—one so cool, the other so burning!—and tried to remember some of the magic words of *the little book*. Not being, like Timothy, instructed in the Scriptures from her childhood, though Helen had daily laboured to supply the deficiency, the only words that just now came to her aid were, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God; believe also in me!"

They were enough: "Let not your heart be troubled"—"Let not your heart be troubled,"—Helen's troubled heart stayed itself on these healing words, and she murmured them instead of "*only* Mr. Howard." Somehow the word *only* still seemed to haunt her. Olga, with a sudden inspiration—was it simply the inspiration of affection?—whispered, "Jesus only." Oh, happy whisper! Helen's lips were soon muttering, in a sort of rhythm,—

> "Jesus only, Jesus only,
> All my trust shall be in Him!"

Towards day, she became perfectly still. Olga, worn out, was presently "sleeping for sorrow." A light kiss awoke her. The good Apollonia, in a surprising cap of quite a different genus from Madame Prascoff's, and in a flounced chintz wrapping-gown, had noiselessly entered, examined her sleeping patient, and was now bending over the sleepy young nurse.

"You must go to bed now, dear child," whispered she; "it is five o'clock—you will have five hours' good sleep before any one is astir, and Stephanie shall arouse you in due time. Not a word! lest you disturb *her*. You need not fear leaving her in my hands. You have done your duty this night affectionately and well."

Tears started into the young girl's eyes; it sounded so like a mother's praise! She returned Apollonia's

"Yes; I have seen Constantine in private, and he assures me that it was entirely owing to the perturbation into which you had thrown him by the exceedingly offensive method of your rejection of him, that he lost his self-government and struck Mr. Howard's fowling-piece."

"He may say so," said Olga; "but there was nothing offensive in what I said, though I certainly made it plain enough."

"It is all to no purpose, Olga, for his wife you will be. The betrothal will take place, either before he leaves this house, or immediately on our return to town; therefore you must reconcile yourself to it as well as you can."

"It never *shall* take place, though," said Olga passionately.

"It *shall!*" cried M. Boris, smiting the stove so hard with his fist that it drew blood. He confirmed it with an oath; and Olga would wait to hear no more.

She reached the corridor, panting and ready to drop. "What is the matter?" said Henri, meeting her.

"My father has sworn," said she, almost voicelessly, "that I shall be betrothed to Constantine before he leaves the house; or, at farthest, immediately on our return to town."

"You shall not!"

"I said so; but oh, Henri, he was in such a rage

as to strike the stove so violently that the blood gushed from his hand; and I think, if I provoke him yet more, he will some of these days strike *me!*"

Henri turned white, and then red.

"He shall not!" repeated he, after a moment's pause. "Trust in me, dear Olga, and fear nothing. He shall not!"

"Helen has taught me to put trust in God," said Olga. "However, in a secondary sense, I do put trust in you. I pray that you may be God's instrument to protect me. Oh Henri, what a difference it makes in our prayers when we ask for something we feel we really *want!*"

"Doubtless," said Henri absently. "But go and lie down now, dear Olga—Stephanie has told me you have been up all night. They will not want you down stairs yet, for they sat up late, playing *écarté;* and if they come down before you do, I will make your excuses. Go now, dear Olga, and rest—don't go first to Helen; for Apollonia is with her, and quite in her element. I must go and convey her report to Mr. Howard, who, as you may suppose, is anxious enough!"

"Is he?" said Olga.

"Why, *don't you know?*" said Henri, with surprise. Then, in an expressive whisper, "Olga, they are in love!"

"No!" cried Olga.

"Engaged!" pursued Henri. "At least, something very akin to it."

"That explains!—" ejaculated Olga.

"Only think of my knowing it before you!"

"Strange, indeed!"

"Yes. There, go now and think it over on your bed, at leisure and in quiet."

"I think I must."

"You must." And pressing her hand, he quitted her, and passed on towards Mr. Howard's room.

Olga reappeared among her guests at the usual hour, simply but not negligently dressed; calmer and graver than was her wont, but courteous and attentive. All this was in obedience to the expressed wish of Helen, seconded by Apollonia.

"Yes, yes," said that good lady, stroking Olga's cheek fondly, "all this will be good discipline for you. We must rejoice with those that rejoice, as well as weep with those that weep. And there's no need, this morning, for weeping—our dear invalid is going on quite nicely; and it is such a privilege to me to take charge of her, that I shall not think of coming down stairs, where nobody wants me, but drink a cup of coffee in the snug little dressing-room between your two rooms. What a pretty idea! Together, though apart! And such a pretty little room as you have made it, too, with its large vases

of flowers, its book-shelves, easy chairs, little tables, and beautiful engravings! Oh, I'm quite glad I came here, I assure you! To be so *pleasantly* useful, is a treat after my own heart. Go, pretty one, go! They will be like beads unstrung without you; but *I*, I shall not be missed!"

Helen smiled concurrence; and Olga, after one long kiss, obeyed. The Birschoffs were all very much out of humour; they scarcely inquired after Helen, and seemed to think Constantine more aggrieved than she was. Paul's platitudes continued to find acceptance with the Miss Prascoffs; their mother observed his attentions with pleasure, and gave Olga broad hints how much they should like to prolong their visit, which Olga would not understand. So, as this was to be their last day, a great deal was to be crowded into it; and Olga, rejoicing in the approaching breaking-up, made munificent arrangements of her time and comfort for their amusement, resolving to do the thing handsomely to the last. Now and then, when her eyes met Mr. Howard's, she gave him an uncommonly bright look; so bright, that had Henri not become possessed of his secret, he would have died of jealousy. Mr. Howard repaid these bright looks by equally bright ones in return, though, not being certified of the extent of her information, he was rather doubtful what they meant. As Madame Birschoff inter-

cepted several of these beaming glances, she became fully convinced of mischief somewhere; and, as soon as breakfast was over, she in a stately manner requested a private interview with Olga in her own dressing-room.

Olga said, "Oh, certainly," lightly; but remained making final arrangements with the Prascoffs for their morning call on the Countess Anastasia, which it was necessary to prepare for early. As M. Boris left the room, he whispered to her, "Mind what you say!" with a warning look. Henri lingered to give her a private hint also; and Olga, thus forewarned, forearmed, paused for a moment in the vestibule, to collect her thoughts before she entered the formidable presence. As the disagreeable interview which followed was strictly between themselves, it need only be said that immediately it was over, Madame Birschoff rang the bell violently, and desired to see M. Birschoff; after speaking with whom for a few minutes, she again rang the bell violently, and desired to see M. Boris. That gentleman was not immediately to be found; and in the meanwhile, Olga, a little fluttered by her own boldness, had time to hasten to the sanctuary of her friend and counsellor, who, blanched like the spotless white all around her, was lying very contentedly in a freshly-made bed, with flowers, fresh air, her Bible on the coverlet, and the kind Apollonia seated beside her.

"Here comes our darling," said Apollonia cheer-

fully. "Dear child, we have been talking of you all the morning! But what is the matter? you look as scared as a little bird at a random shot."

"Oh, I have had such a tiresome closeting with Madame Birschoff!" said Olga. "But it is over now."

"And it must have come sooner or later," said Madame Miloff. "I guess what it was all about. Be firm, Olga, be firm! That young man is wholly unworthy of you. He is dreadfully fond of *écarté*."

"It is very easy to say, be firm," said Olga, smiling a little, "but rather hard for so young a girl as I am to fight the battle, all by myself, against papa and the three Birschoffs."

"Oh, I will take your part, and so, I am sure, will your good cousin Henri; and I need hardly say, if it would be of the least use, so would Paul."

"Unfortunately, it would not," said Olga, "though I thank you all the same."

"Individually," suggested Apollonia, "our voices would go for nothing; but collectively they might. Public opinion is a powerful engine; and if the public opinion made itself known that you would be thrown away upon Constantine, public opinion might have some weight."

"Public opinion has very little weight, I'm afraid," said Olga, "against private obstinacy and interest."

"M. Boris desires to see you immediately, Made-

moiselle, in Madame Birschoff's dressing-room," said Stephanie, at the door.

"Say I am coming directly," returned Olga; and bending over Helen to kiss her, she whispered, "You naughty Helen, I have found you out! I know all!"

Helen blushed like a rose; and Olga, smiling gaily, withdrew. In about a quarter of an hour she returned, looking jaded and harassed. Helen's pitying look overcame her; she turned her head aside and burst into tears.

"Poor child! poor child!" cried Apollonia, laying aside her knitting, and taking her hand. "Never mind them, dear—never mind them! Be firm, be firm!"

Olga could not help laughing. "There was no want of firmness, they would tell you," said she. "My father politely said I was as obstinate as a pig. However, the betrothal is at least put off till we return to town; and Madame Birschoff and I have made ourselves so thoroughly unpleasant to each other, that she is going to pack up immediately and depart before dinner. Meanwhile, I must go with the Prascoffs to the Countess Anastasia; and since I must not remain up here, it will be rather a relief to me to be out of the house. Dear, good Apollonia! what a treasure you are! What should we do just now without you?" And giving the old lady one of her impulsive embraces, Olga departed.

The four ladies filled the britzka; Mr. Howard, Henri, and Paul, were their escorts. The drive was pleasant enough; they found the Countess, as usual, surrounded by her political friends, and, whether politically or in some other capacity, Frederick Vassilivitch was comprised among them; and, half reclining in a picturesque posture at the Countess Emilia's feet, rather took Olga by surprise. But his power over her was gone; to her improved taste he appeared vulgar, and her improved judgment pronounced him superficial; while his ostentatiously paraded admiration of a new object showed neither good feeling nor good manners.

As Olga's emotions were very easily discernible in her honest countenance, Frederick had the satisfaction of seeing that he annoyed her a little; while he had the disappointment of likewise perceiving that annoyance was the utmost amount of the pain he could now inflict upon her, and that she was feeling less and less of it every moment. Olga would not shorten her visit; the whole party were invited by the Countess Anastasia to luncheon; after which they strolled round the pleasure grounds, now gay with autumnal tints of every dye, from the darkest green and mulberry colour to the gayest yellow and scarlet.

They then returned home, just in time to receive the cold adieux of the Birschoffs.



CHAPTER XXII.

THE NEST FORSAKEN.

HENRI was very soon summoned to M. Boris's study, which was becoming quite a terror to the family.

"Henri," said he abruptly, "when is this Englishman going?"

"Mr. Howard, sir? Upon my word, sir, you ought to know best."

"I know nothing at all—he keeps staying on and on, without having the manners to go; and no Russian can be so ill-bred as to give a guest notice to quit; yet his presence begins to be as tiresome to me as, I am aware, it has long been to you."

"On the contrary, sir, I think him a very capital fellow!"

"Appearances have belied you, then. Why, last week, you could hardly speak civilly to him!—and, once or twice, you were so rude, that I wondered how his good-humour could enable him to put up with it."

"Appearances have deceived us both, it seems,"

said Henri. "Why now, to me you appeared so fond of him that I was ready to be jealous!"

"Did I?"

"You did, indeed, sir!"

"Well—you see, he's writing a book about us, and I did not want him to receive any unfavourable impressions: add to which, he's a pleasant companion enough; and when you've said that, you've said all. He's a mere swallow, a bird of passage."

"Just so, sir."

"Then why does not he fly away?"

Henri could not help laughing. "Upon my word, sir, I don't know."

"But could not you give him a little hint?—*you* are not his host, you know—that you yourself will soon be on the move, and you suppose he will be,—or something of that sort?"

("So," thought Henri, "that's my hint.") "Well, sir, I can sound him."

"Aye, do. That's just what I want. He is, as you say, a capital fellow; but, you see, Henri, he's not quite safe."

"Is not he?" said Henri, looking mystified.

"Not quite safe here, just at present," repeated M. Boris. "Madame Birschoff gave me a hint of it. Olga is becoming too partial to him."

"I'd stake my life, sir, Madame Birschoff is quite mistaken! She is only afraid of any one competing *with* her son."

"There may be just reason for her fear, though, and I do not choose there should be any; for, be things how they may, her son and Olga will be betrothed directly we get back to town."

"Uncle, will you bear with me for a moment? I am very sorry to tell you—"

"What? Don't hesitate."

"—That young man is very fond of play."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"He is, indeed, sir. He's deeply in debt to Frederick Vassilivitch."

"Pooh, pooh!"

"I can assure you of it."

"And what if you can? I'm *resolved* the marriage shall take place."

"Surely, dear sir, you have some regard for the interests and happiness of your only child?"

"In consulting one, I consult both. She is too young to know what her real happiness is."

"But you *won't* consult her interest if you marry her to a man addicted to high play. Your fine fortune will go to pay his debts of honour."

"How do you know anything about my fine fortune, Mr. Henri?"

"Certainly, sir, I know nothing."

"No, nor are likely to do. For anything you know about it, I may be as poor as a beggar. I may be as fond of play as Constantine Petrovitch. I may be as deep in his debt as he is to Frederick

Vassilivitch. I may have muddled, or squandered, or speculated away every penny I have, and mortgaged every one of my serfs."

"You *may*, sir, certainly," said Henri, looking confounded.

"See then, how little you know what you are talking about! Go, go! leave me to settle my own affairs, and settle yours as you like. I have seen a little of life, and of the world, and of human nature, and am not quite a fool. Afford me your advice when I ask it!"

Henri bowed and withdrew. Only Mr. Howard was in the drawing-room—the ladies were hurrying their toilettes.

"Helen's better," said he, laying down a pamphlet. "I have seen your doctor, Killemoff, or whatever his name is, and he assures me she is completely out of danger, and will soon be quite well."

"That's a comfort," said Henri, "for, well or ill, you will not be very welcome if you remain here much longer to watch her. My uncle has just been asking me how long you mean to stay, and I promised to sound you: and this is the way I set about it."

They both laughed.

"What an old curmudgeon he is!" said Mr. Howard. "However, I really have already paid him an inordinately long visit; and important *purposes* have been answered by it; therefore, as it

is pleasanter to take one's leave than be told to go, I'll drop him a hint, in the course of the evening, that I mean to go to Moscow the day after to-morrow."

"That will be a good move," said Henri; "and if I can leave Olga with any comfort, I'll go too; and we can travel so far together in my troïka."

The entrance of Madame Prascoff and her daughters precluded more being said. Paul quickly followed; and Olga prevailed on Apollonia to leave Helen to the care of Stephanie, and resume her customary place at table.

Though the party was shrunken, there was a subdued pleasantness in it. Paul, between Serafina and Elizabeth, cheerfully submitted to be made much of by them. M. Boris, receiving an early intimation, dropped casually, that Henri and Mr. Howard would leave him on the next day but one, was as cordial to both of them as it was in his nature to be to any one. They were both cheerful, and succeeded in communicating their cheerfulness to Olga and Madame Miloff without much difficulty, though, as has already been said, it was of a subdued complexion.

In the evening, while M. Boris and Madame Prascoff were having a game at preference, and the Miss Prascoffs were trying to teach Paul to sing, Helen was sitting up, wrapped in shawls, and having what she called a "cosy" gossip with Olga and

Madame Miloff. And as the good Apollonia had completely won her heart by her motherly ways and girl-like sympathy, Helen did not know why she should not win her confidence too; and when Olga, after many shallow, mysterious allusions, said—"I may tell her, Helen, may not I?" Helen, with a soft blush and gentle flutter, said, "Oh,—yes, if you will."

Apollonia listened eagerly to the news, and congratulated her most warmly upon it.

"Only it is not at all fixed," said Helen.

"Oh, but it soon will be," cried the sanguine Madame Miloff. "Your good mother is sure to consent. You have given me a complete idea of her and of your English home, with its jessamines and verbenas, by the aid of that famous sketch-book of yours. The only person I am sorry for is Paul."

"Paul!" ejaculated Helen; while Olga looked ready to laugh before she heard the joke.

"Yes, my dear young friend; for so much have I seen of you during my short visit here, that I am convinced you could make Paul happy. However, events are otherwise ordained,—all for the best, I doubt not; and as for Olga, it is easy to see where *her* preference lies!"

"Where?" cried Olga, in amaze.

"Ah, you may well blush like scarlet. Never mind; he's quite worthy of you! A very nice young man, though he *has* cut out Paul! Why, did I not

see him making his court to you this morning in the window of Stephanie's little glass-closet?"

"No!" replied Olga, bursting into a fit of laughter, though her cheeks were burning. "For pity's sake, keep your imaginings to yourself, and don't reveal them to papa, or I shall be worse off than ever!"

"Rely upon my discretion," said Apollonia very gravely.

"And now, Apollonia, do tell me, like a dear, discreet woman as you are—do you not think, when the Prascoffs are gone to-morrow, Helen, if she tries to be very well indeed, may without harm be moved into our little boudoir adjoining, that you are so fond of?"

"Indeed, I think so," said Madame Miloff, "though I am the last person who would advise anything precipitate."

"And do not you think, that as Mr. Howard will go away the following morning, he might, without any breach of the proprieties, come up there and have a little chat with Helen in the course of the afternoon? you or I playing duenna, of course, with plenty of cotton wool stuffed into our ears?"

A faint colour on Helen's cheeks showed how much she would like it, though she laughed at the idea of Olga's playing duenna, and said she thought Madame Miloff would do much better.

Madame Miloff thought so too; therefore Olga,

having carried her point, left them to dwell on the agreeable future, while she went, as she said, to tempt Henri to let the Miss Prascoffs hear what good singing really was.

Helen slept all the better for her pleasant prospect of the morrow, and in the morning was pronounced by Madame Miloff to have made so much progress as to be quite equal to sitting up for a few hours in the dressing-room. Olga arranged cushions for effect as well as comfort on the little couch, and made the most tasteful arrangement of draperies, books, flowers, and fancy-works, with a girlish pleasure in setting Helen out to the greatest advantage for her lover. Helen was such a pretty invalid, that she needed none of these adventitious attractions; but still they were finishing touches of a picture, every detail of which Mr. Howard might carry away in his heart. Whether he did so, or whether it had only room for Helen, he himself could best tell, after he had spoken his last word and looked his last look. His heart sunk a little as he left her, at the thought how many things might go wrong before he saw her again.

Meanwhile, Olga had sped her parting guests, the Prascoffs, who very sincerely expressed themselves very sorry to go; and she had done the kindest thing she could, by persuading Paul to attend them home. On his return he seemed much pleased: "the old lady," as he called her, had in-

sisted on his going in and tasting her *crême-de-noyau;* and had invited him to dine there, quite in an unceremonious way, the following week.

That evening the party was very small, and rather quiet. Helen was very feverish; all the more so, perhaps, for three or four little notes from Mr. Howard, brought to her at intervals by the complaisant Stephanie; who, while any demand for vigilance in the invalid-room remained, took precedence of Axinia. Madame Miloff played preference with M. Boris. Mr. Howard came and went, collecting his books, manuscripts, and drawings, and persuading Henri and Olga to give him a good many drawings of their own, besides helping himself to as many as he liked (with permission) from Helen's portfolio. He had also managed to obtain from the soft-hearted Olga the beautiful tress of hair. Henri and Olga sat over a chess-board, moving the pieces, but conversing very earnestly in low tones, less audible than whispers. They were both very anxious about her future prospects.

The next day the party was yet smaller. Helen, without much regard for her health, managed to be dressed and carried into the boudoir time enough to receive Mr. Howard's last farewells. Henri talked earnestly and sorrowfully to Olga, instead of eating his breakfast; and soon—too soon—the troïka was at the door. Farewells were spoken again and again, and soon the travellers were seen fast driving down

the lime-tree avenue. Olga watched them till they disappeared, and then turned away with a heavy heart. Paul observed, they should be very dull now, and wished he could do anything for her, for that he felt quite brotherly to her. This sounded like quite a sensible observation from him; and Olga told him that if he would make a collection of birds' feathers for Miss May, gum them on cards, and write the names under them, she was sure Helen would like it very much. This set Paul to work for hours.

She was glad to have found an indoor's employment for him, for the weather was breaking up very much, and winter coming on fast. Apollonia consented to prolong her visit for a week, for the sake of cheering up her young friends; and virtue was its own reward, for they cheered her too; and she returned home with her mind stored with agreeable and self-approving memories—no bad provision for "the evening of life." As for Paul, she declared his visit had quite brightened him up; and, indeed, a great deal of the mould and mildew had really been rubbed off: and *he*, too, had his agreeable memories to fall back on throughout the whole of the ensuing inclement winter; frequently alluding to them, when warmly shut in for the evening, with the preface, "I say, aunt, do you remember when we were making that pleasant visit at Vogdolitch, with those pretty girls, the Prascoffs?"

Mr. Howard and Henri would have written, had

it not been for a salutary fear of M. Boris's inspecting their confidential letters. M. Boris now began to talk of returning to his warm house in the old cathedral town for the winter; every allusion to which filled Olga with pain and fear, for she knew her betrothal was intended closely to follow. She procured delays from time to time, on the plea that Helen was not yet strong enough to travel; and though M. Boris considered the objection of no moment, and, in Helen's absence, spoke of her as little more than a superior servant, full paid and overpaid for her services, he yielded oftener than might have been expected; perhaps from a natural preference for the present lull to the commotion he was aware would take place when Olga was commanded to submit to the betrothal.

Thus time wore away, pensively and heavily, till M. Boris definitely fixed the day for the journey. There was a tacit agreement to say nothing of the hateful ceremony as long as it could be avoided; but Olga felt its dreary shadow surrounding her. Farewell visits were paid to Apollonia and the Prascoffs, in spite of the horses being scarcely able to flounder through the mud; and once or twice they literally stuck fast. These excursions were good preparations, Helen said, for her longer journey. The good Apollonia took leave of them with tears, and her young friends could not forbear weeping a little from sympathy. Even Paul began to doubt whether he ought

to find a use for his handkerchief, and blew his nose sonorously by way of exciting his emotions.

"You have been very kind to me always," said he, gazing tenderly on Olga, after putting her in the carriage; "that is—"

"Good-bye, Paul Adamovitch!—be very kind to your serfs," said Olga. "Remember, that is my parting injunction. And see if you can't get through Peter the Great this winter; for I shall ask you next spring. Above all, be sure you look in pretty often on the Prascoffs; for you will quite enliven them. You know they don't see a nice young man every day."

"Your will shall be my law," said he; and his blue eyes were fixed upon her to the last.

Helen was not strong enough to pay two visits in one day; and as it yet wanted a week to the day fixed on for their journey, they deferred calling on the Prascoffs till the morrow.

The next morning, however, Olga put her cheerful face through Helen's half-opened door, exclaiming, "Jack Frost, as you call him, has come at last, and the ground is like glass. No chance of our stirring out again till the horses are rough-shod."

The piercing cold had indeed set in, and the winter closed upon them in earnest. Although Vogdolitch was very cold, Olga had grown so fond of it, that she said she would sooner traverse the snow in a sledge, than start a day before the time.

It was not left to her choice, however. On the

third day of the frost, while they were at breakfast, M. Boris received a letter, which he had no sooner read hastily, than he let it drop from his hand, and fell back in his chair. Olga uttered a cry, and hastened to loosen his collar; but he roused himself directly by a strong effort, apparently impelled thereto by the fear of her taking up the letter, and reading it; seized it himself, thrust it into his pocket, and gasped out, "That rascal Alexis!—he has been too sharp for me at last! Prepare for an instant journey home, Olga!—if I do not reach it in twelve hours, I am ruined!"

His distress was so terrible that Olga trembled, and longed to speak, but dared not. Obedience and celerity, she saw, would be the greatest kindnesses she could show him. In an incredibly short time every necessary preparation was made; everything that could be left behind was left. Wrapped to their chins in furs, and with boiling-hot foot-warmers under their feet, they commenced their comfortless and perilous journey.

"Papa," said Olga, after a long silence, "could Henri help you?"

"No, I am afraid not. There is no knowing. Some spy has betrayed me to the police—betrayed is the wrong word. You interrupt me, my dear—I must think over what must be done. I am accused —wrongfully, of course—to the Government."

The tone was kinder than usual—Olga felt it. She

would have taken his hand, if it had not been buried in a mass of fur; but he was out of reach—impenetrable, morally and bodily. His own soul alone knew its burden.

Afraid of intruding on him again, Olga remained silent, or addressed now and then a whispered remark to Helen. All was cheerless, without and within. They travelled slowly, on account of the frost. They observed that water was everywhere frozen, as long as they could observe anything; but it soon became impossible to see through the carriage windows. Before they started, M. Boris had given orders for fresh horses to be taken on at every post-house, and had sent forward a courier to bespeak them. They were fortunate in not being detained anywhere.

Towards the middle of the day, Olga unpacked the sandwich-basket. There was a brandy-flask, which, as a Russian, M. Boris did not fail to make use of; he even pressed his companions to share some of its contents, diluted. He ate his sandwiches with avidity; and Olga then ventured to say,—

"Perhaps, papa, as M. Birschoff is in the same office, he may be of some assistance to you."

"No, my love, no. On the contrary, as he is a step below me, and would gain a higher position by my removal, I fear he may rejoice at it."

"*My love!*" How a kind word always went to Olga's heart! The hand was ungloved now; she *bent* down and kissed it. He appeared not to notice

the caress, and, having finished his slight meal, leant his head back, and shut his eyes, as if to sleep; but the wistful Olga saw a tear shining on his eyelashes. Though a tear of self-pity, how often she thought with tenderness of it afterwards!

The cold became more extreme as they proceeded. "What must it be in Siberia!" thought Helen. M. Boris's suspicions of M. Birschoff had brought to her mind a hackneyed aphorism—

> "The friendships of the world are oft
> Confederacies of vice, or leagues of pleasure."

"What has become now," thought she, "of the bond of union that lately existed between these two men? It has dissolved at the first touch of self-interest."

M. Boris's impatience towards the end of the day became uncontrollable. He urged the drivers forward by large rewards; and once, when there appeared a chance of their being delayed for some hours, he was almost frenzied. By dint of adjurations and bribes, he pushed forward as rapidly as there was any possibility of doing; and the end was that they drove into his own courtyard just at nine o'clock.

"Where's Alexis?" was his first hurried inquiry of the good-natured looking dwornick, who came up, touching his cap to his master.

The dwornick replied he did not know.

"Go and ask," said M. Boris; "it is past office-hours." And, hurrying into the house, he snatched up a lamp, and locked himself into his own study.

Olga and Helen, nearly frozen with cold, crept, cowering, to the stove. Their arrival was unexpected and premature—nothing was ready, and the house felt fearfully cold. While their bedrooms and supper were being hastily prepared, Michael came in and told his young mistress that the dwornick could not find Alexis.

"Tell my father—stay, I will tell him," said Olga. She ran to his study-door, and tapped, saying—"Papa! papa!"

"What is the matter?" said he, opening the door and looking very white.

"Nothing to alarm you. Only that Alexis cannot be found."

"The thing of all others to alarm me," cried he. "The villain has absconded! I must go at once to the office—" He turned round, and hastily completed what he was about. He was thrusting a great many papers into the stove, and waiting to see them consumed.

"Oh, papa, it is so bitterly cold, you will catch your death if you go out."

"I can't help it."

"Shall the dwornick fetch you a drosky?"

"No, I shall make myself warmer walking, and save time."

"Save time—How can that be?"

"It is some little distance to the drosky-stand, and no little distance to the nearest bridge. Is the *river* frozen, Elias?"

"Oh yes, bârin."

"Quite across?"

"Oh yes, bârin. Men and boys have got across it all day."

"Papa, it cannot be safe."

"Trust me, my dear, to look after my own safety."

He finished buttoning his fur coat, pulled his fur cap over his eyebrows, and set forth; Olga wistfully looking after him. He passed across the court, through the deep-shadowed archway, into the open street.

The streets were ill-paved, but tolerably lighted. The hot tea-shops and whisky-shops were full of customers; little oil-lamps were winking before miserable pictures of St. Antony and St. Sergo; men and boys were running about the streets on their various errands, speaking cheerfully to each other; horses in telegas and tarantasses were slipping on the ice.

The river-side was dark and ill-lighted. But M. Boris knew every step. He spoke to somebody standing on the brink. "Is it safe?"

"Quite safe."

He took one step on the river—then drew back. "What if it be not? Pshaw! this is no time for misgivings. The emergency is great—dangerous papers must be destroyed." He proceeds: he gains the middle. Oh, wretched man! The ice gives way beneath him!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BIRDS SCATTERED.

OLGA and Helen awaited M. Boris's return in great anxiety. At length, Olga decided that his disagreeable business would detain him at the office all night, and that they had better not sit up for him. The dwornick would let him in.

Early in the morning Stephanie awoke Olga with looks of alarm. M. Boris had not come in all night, and Alexis could nowhere be found.

"There are strange reports about," said Stephanie, checking a sob, "but I'm sure Alexis has done no harm."

Olga was dismayed and perplexed. Since neither Henri nor Mr. Howard were at hand, and the Birschoffs could not be consulted, she knew not what to do.

At length, with Helen's approval, she wrote a little note to her father, and sent it to the office by the dwornick.

Some time elapsed before his return, and when he

came, it was to say M. Boris had not been seen at the office. His room was locked up.

At this moment, Alexis burst in, looking white as ashes. "Sudarina!" cried he, "do not believe me to be a villain. Some spy has certainly been abstracting papers of my master's, but it was not I! On the contrary, directly I found the police were about to apprehend him, I sent him notice through a friend, and it was only on his service that I have made a hurried journey. They tell me he is neither to be found at home nor in the office. Surely they cannot yet have seized him! Can he have absconded? I will hasten to make every inquiry."

"Thank heaven, Alexis is innocent!" exclaimed Olga, as soon as he was gone. Stephanie clasped her hands and looked upwards.

Some hours after, Alexis returned looking haggard and awe-stricken. "His papers are seized," said he, "and the police are hunting for him high and low; but they will never find him, for—"

"What? Oh, speak quickly!" cried Olga.

"Alas! sudarina, he attempted to cross the river. The ice gave way."

Olga uttered a faint cry, and hid her face in her hands.

"Has everything been done—?" cried Helen.

"Everything that *could* be done," said Alexis sadly, "but what was there to do? The river cannot be dragged—the under-current has drifted him far

away by this time, and the ice will not break up before the spring. He will never be found. Lives are lost in this way every winter."

Olga by this time was weeping passionately. Her sobs at length became convulsive. Stephanie, sobbing bitterly, vainly brought her strong restoratives, while Helen supported her in her arms and spoke to her in the most soothing tones.

When she became composed enough to speak, her first words were "Henri—send for Henri." Every one felt it the best thing. Helen wrote a few lines, which Alexis undertook to despatch immediately by a safe hand.

By the time Henri came, all the town knew the story, more or less distorted. M. Boris was understood to have defrauded Government to an enormous extent; his property was confiscated, and his daughter was a beggar. The Birschoffs, who at first had sent hypocritical condolences, now thought it best to give up Olga altogether; while other acquaintances, less self-interested, made kind inquiries and offered temporary assistance. But Olga declined it, and was inaccessible to everybody. Henri found his uncle's will, bequeathing a large fortune to Olga, which now no longer existed, and leaving her and it to the guardianship of Henri's father. That father, a kind and honourable man, Henri was assured would not give up his trust, though Olga was portionless. He *wrote* to him instantly; and persuaded her, directly

the answer arrived, to let him escort her and Helen to his parents, who were now in St. Petersburg, and of whose kind reception he made no doubt. The answer could not reach them in less than a fortnight; but they did not wait for it, for the house they occupied was no longer their own—everything in it was forfeited; and Helen and Olga, under the protection of Henri, found themselves quitting the town in little more than a week after their entering it.

Their preoccupied minds rendered them less sensible to the horrors of a winter journey through Russia than they would otherwise have been; and Henri's kindness softened the trials he could not remove. They had long and fruitless discussions on the future; fruitless, because they were utterly ignorant how far M. Boris's peculations had extended, or were known. To himself he had lived, and to himself he had died. The ice had not more completely closed over his remains than mystery had sealed his intentions.

Arrived at St. Petersburg, the travellers received the kindest welcome from Henri's parents; and, to Helen's surprise and joy, Mr. Howard was there too. Henri had introduced him to his father and mother, with whom he had speedily become domesticated. M. Brunoff, being a benevolent and honourable man, considered Olga as truly his ward as if there had been a large fortune to take charge of for her; and

his soft-hearted wife, reminded by her of an early-lost daughter, felt so drawn towards her by love and pity, that she soon became, in fact, the adopted child of the house. Nor was Helen less kindly treated. She had as yet received no answer from her mother, and it became doubtful whether her own letter had ever reached its destination. M. Boris might have suppressed it, for the sake of retaining her with Olga. Those who do shabby things are always liable to the suspicion of shabby things they do not. Helen lost no time in writing again to her mother, stating the recent events that had taken place, and telling her that it seemed concluded she should remain Olga's companion till the spring.

Meanwhile, M. Boris's worldly substance, including his serfs, had passed into the hands of Government; and Stephanie and Alexis might have been parted for ever, had not Alexis, during his long, lonely summer, occupied his spare time in a very clever and useful mechanical invention for the dock-yards, which raised him in such high estimation that he was instantly appointed a good salary, and had only to ask and have granted any reasonable request. So he asked and obtained leave to marry Stephanie; and their wedding was the first event which roused and cheered Olga.

But this winter, though quiet and sad, was very salutary to her; nay, it was of immense importance to her character. She had been so long accustomed

to believe herself the heiress to immense wealth that she had been profuse and self-conceited; she was now humbled to find herself despoiled of everything, and entirely dependent on others; but the sense and piety of Helen directed her to turn this to good account, and what she had lost in prosperity, she gained in humility and meekness. Her aunt and uncle became so affectionately attached to her, that Henri, who was, in fact, no relation to her,* had little difficulty in obtaining their consent to his marrying Olga on her eighteenth birthday, which would be in the spring; and Mr. Howard, cordially recognised by Helen's mother as a future member of her family, resolved to await the same day to make Helen his bride and carry her back to England.

One day, when Helen was looking at some trinkets, with a view, as Olga shrewdly suspected, of making her some little wedding-present, she whispered, "Don't buy any of those things for me, Helen—I will tell you, by and by, what I want."

On their return home, she went into Helen's room, and said, "Forgive me, if I guessed you to be intending any of those pretty things for me; but, do you know, I should so much prefer your giving me something that has belonged to yourself!"

"Certainly, then, I will," said Helen; "but I have so little worth acceptance! What shall it be?"

* The Russians are not allowed to marry within four degrees of cousinship.

"Your Bible," said Olga.

Helen's face lighted up. "May God bless it to you!" said she fervently. "Are you sure Henri would like you to have it?"

"Quite: I asked him. He said, 'By all means.'"

Helen lifted up her heart in mental prayer.

Peacefully and happily the remainder of the winter passed away, though unenlivened to them by any participation in the festivities at opera, theatre, and ball, which had so often made Olga long to winter in St. Petersburg. Meanwhile, rumours of war filled the land, and made the young brides-expectant begin their wedding preparations sooner than they had intended. Mr. Howard pressed for an earlier day than Olga's birthday, lest communication with England should be difficult or impossible; and, as soon as the ice broke up, passports were obtained, and the double wedding took place, though not in the same church.

"You have made her what she is," said Henri gratefully to Helen, as she gave Olga her last kiss, "and I hope you will, at no distant period, come to see how she thrives under my care. God bless you, and soon grant us a solid and righteous *Peace!*"

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